SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1999

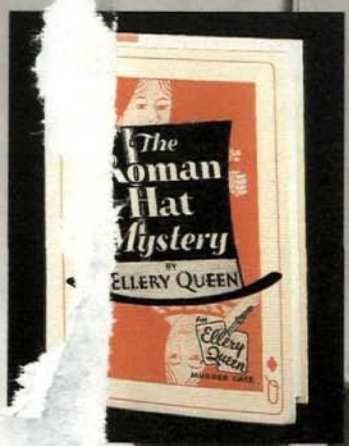
DOUBLE ISSUE!

ELLERY QUEEN®

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Celebrating a Great Detective's 70th Birthday!

Ellery Queen



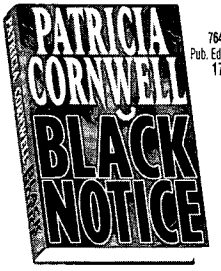
2 CLASSIC and 2 NEW Ellery Queen Stories!

$4.[illegible] / $5.95 CAN.

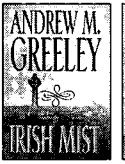
10

0 74851 08599 8

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



7641* Pub. Ed. $25.95 17¢

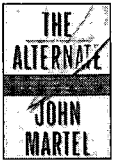


7534 Pub. Ed. $23.95 17¢

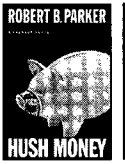
5116 Pub. Ed. $24.00 17¢

7997* Spec. Ed. $19.98 17¢

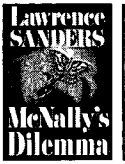
8803* Spec. Ed. $19.98 17¢



8011* Pub. Ed. $24.95 17¢

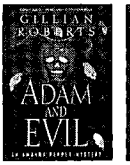


0679* Pub. Ed. $22.95 17¢

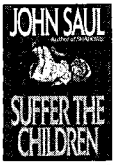


8029 Pub. Ed. $24.95 17¢

8037 Pub. Ed. $23.95 17¢



8045 Pub. Ed. $22.95 17¢

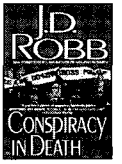


7732* Spec. Ed. $19.98 17¢

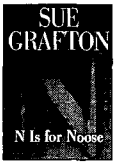
7252 Pub. Ed. $25.00 17¢

3434* Pub. Ed. $24.95 17¢

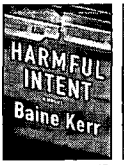
1594 Pub. Ed. $21.95 17¢



2204* Spec. Ed. $19.98 17¢



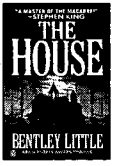
5496* Pub. Ed. $25.00 17¢



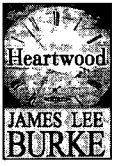
7765 Pub. Ed. $25.00 17¢

7500 Pub. Ed. $22.00 17¢

3327 Pub. Ed. $22.95 17¢



7336* Spec. Ed. $19.98 17¢



3988* Pub. Ed. $24.95 17¢

7872* Pub. Ed. $25.95 17¢

7203 Pub. Ed. $24.00 17¢

1503 Pub. Ed. $22.00 17¢

3897 Pub. Ed. $22.00 17¢

7 REASONS TO JOIN NOW...

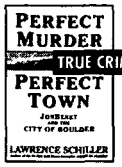
1. Joining is easy. Start with **6 books for 99¢.** Your bill (including shipping and handling) will come when membership is confirmed. We'll also send you your FREE Nylon Tote. **2. Your satisfaction is guaranteed.** If you're not happy with your books, return them within 10 days *at our expense.* Your membership will be canceled; you'll owe nothing. The Free Tote is yours to keep as our "thank you" for trying us. **3. Save up to 60% off** publishers' hardcover edition prices. Every book we offer is a high-quality, full-text edition, sometimes altered in size to fit special presses. Just pick at least 4 more books at our regular low prices during your membership. Take up to 2 years! Then you may resign any time. **4. Extra bonus!** Take a 7th book now for $3.99, plus shipping and handling, and reduce your membership agreement to only 3 books. **5. A FREE Club Magazine** comes to you up to 17 times a year—plus up to 2 special issues. Each reviews the Featured Book Selections plus dozens of alternate books. Some are exclusive Club editions you won't find anywhere else. **6. Ordering is risk free.** Featured Book Selections are sent to you automatically. To cancel—or order other books—simply send in your Member Reply Form by mail or contact our Web site by the marked date. Shipping and handling (plus sales tax, where applicable) is added to each order. You'll always have 10 days to decide. If your Member Reply Form is late and unwanted books arrive, please return them *at our expense.* **7. Online convenience.** Join at our Web site, **www.MysteryGuild.com,** for faster service and an even larger selection of books. Members may order books online or by mail.

FREE NYLON TOTE
with membership
F995

* Explicit scenes and/or language Prices in fine print are for publishers' editions.
Spec. Ed. prices are hardcover editions exclusively for Club members. All prices are current as we go to press.

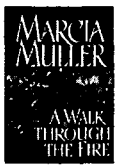
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mystery Loves Company



7740* Pub. Ed. $26.00 17¢

7650* Pub. Ed. $29.95 17¢

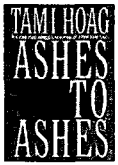


0497 Pub. Ed. $29.00 17¢

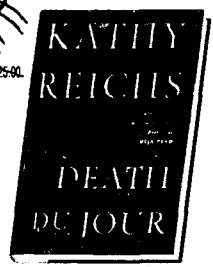
7914 Pub. Ed. $24.00 17¢

2220 Pub. Ed. $27.95 17¢

7898* Pub. Ed. $23.95 17¢



7468* Pub. Ed. $24.95 17¢



7518 Spec. Ed. $19.98 17¢

7153 Pub. Ed. $25.00 17¢

TAKE ANY **6** MYSTERIES FOR **99¢** with membership

MYSTERY GUILD

www.MysteryGuild.com

MAIL TO: *Mystery Guild*
6550 East 30th Street
P.O. Box 6362
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6362

Please write book numbers here:

59

YES! Please enroll me in *Mystery Guild*® according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 6 BOOKS I've indicated. Bill me just 99¢, plus shipping and handling. Also, send my FREE Nylon Tote.

SAVE EVEN MORE! Send me this book now and reduce my commitment to 3 books. Bill me an added $3.99, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

ET033 58

Mr./Mrs. _____

Miss/Ms. _____
(please print)

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Telephone, please (_____) _____

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application.

EQM 9-10/99

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS

Cold comfort
Page 12

Buried Secrets
Page 44

Cover Photo
Manfred B. Lee and
Frederic Dannay
courtesy of
Eric Schaal/ *Life*
Magazine C Time

Dell Magazines
475 Park Avenue So.
New York, NY 10016

Note: indicia on
page 239

FICTION

The Three Widows
BY ELLERY QUEEN 7

The Ice Shelf
BY CLARK HOWARD 12

Rumpole and the Absence of Body
BY JOHN MORTIMER 35

The Bread of Affliction
BY MICHAEL A. KAHN 44

The Hanged Man
BY IAN RANKIN 67

The Last of the Rosenthals
BY PETER TURNBULL 74

Hidden Talent
BY HELEN TUCKER 94

SPECIAL FEATURES

America's Greatest Fictional Detective:
HOW IT ALL STARTED 4

A Letter to Readers
BY FREDERIC DANNAY 5

REVIEWS

The Jury Box
BY JON L. BREEN 41

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dark journey
Page 152

Blind mistake
Page 184

FICTION

The Circle of Ink
BY EDWARD D. HOCH 100

The Girl in the Picture
BY HAYFORD PEIRCE 120

Cat Thief
BY ERNEST DUDLEY 139

Wedding Anniversary
BY ELLERY QUEEN 142

Train to Nowhere
BY TOM TOLNAY 152

The Gilbert and Sullivan Clue
BY JON L. BREEN 162

In Charity with Her Neighbour
BY DAVID WILLIAMS 184

The Reluctant Op
BY BARBARA PAUL 198

FIRST STORIES

The Naughty Professor
BY DOUGLAS MCKINSTRY 174

POETRY

On My Mark
BY STEPHEN D. ROGERS 65

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How It All Started

With 150,000,000 copies of their books sold worldwide, Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee figure among the bestselling mystery writers of all time. Their most famous creation, Ellery Queen—cool, intellectual, tall, an elegant dresser; hero of his creators' very first book—captured the imagination of the mystery-reading public in his debut case, *The Roman Hat Mystery*. With an eye, early on, to the commercial success of their fictional detective, Dannay and Lee decided to avoid the confusion caused by readers recalling the name of a series detective hero but not the author of the series: they would take the name of their character as their own pseudonym. Thus arose their unusual use of the Ellery Queen byline for third-person stories about a character called Ellery Queen.

Thirty-two more novels featuring the detached and erudite sleuth, nearly a dozen short-story collections, and over 300 radio scripts followed Lee and Dannay's first successful Ellery Queen novel. Over the forty-two years in which the Queen novels appeared (from 1929-1971), Ellery—and the books themselves—underwent a transformation. As Frederic Dannay explained it a few years before his death in 1982, in the early Ellery Queen books "there were always baffling situations, with Ellery airing every possibility, giving the reader all the facts, analyzing every aspect of the crime, until only one solution remained." In the thirties and forties, with the Depression worsening and war looming, more realistic fiction gained popularity. According to Dannay, "The structure of the detective novel was deliberately loosened." Even mystery stories began to concern themselves more with character than complexities of plot. The next logical step was for detective fiction writers to take up serious themes—as Dannay and Lee did in the later Queen books, in which they have Ellery and his father, NYPD cop Richard Queen, delve into investigations that involve religion, McCarthyism, and facism.

In this special issue honoring the seventieth anniversary of the publication of the first Ellery Queen book, we have reprinted two of the original stories: one, "The Three Widows," more characteristic of the earlier "pure puzzle" cases; the other, "Wedding Anniversary," set in Wrightsville, the town that became the setting for the detective's more mature and philosophical adventures. Two new cases, pastiches by Edward D. Hoch and Jon L. Breen, show how vivid the character Ellery Queen remains today, despite the nearly thirty years that have elapsed since the publication of the last book penned by Dannay and Lee.

The story of Dannay and Lee, the two cousins from Brooklyn who became Ellery Queen the author, is as engaging as the story of their illustrious character. To give you a sense of how it all started for both author and character, *EQMM* proudly offers the following excerpts from Frederic Dannay's own introduction to 1979's 50th anniversary reissue of *The Roman Hat Mystery*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear Reader:

Somewhere in the archives of the Library of Congress, in Washington D.C., there is a record that reads:

> *The Roman Hat Mystery, A Problem in Deduction,* by Ellery Queen, pseudonym. Registered in the name of Frederick A. Stokes Co. under A10809, following publication August 15, 1929.

That is the birth certificate of the first book by and about Ellery Queen. . . What are the mystery origins of *The Roman Hat?* What sources did Manfred B. Lee and Frederic Dannay draw upon to create Ellery and his father, Inspector Richard Queen? Which books of our boyhood . . . might have influenced our imaginations?

Well, speaking for myself . . . my literary childhood consisted of Horatio Alger, Peck's Bad Boy, Tom Swift, the Viking legends, the multicolored Andrew Lang fairy books, Frank Merriwell, Baseball Joe, the Rover Boys, the Boy Allies, J. Fenimore Cooper, Tarzan, Jules Verne, the *Three Musketeers*—and, yes, the Oz stories. Somehow the scarlet thread of crime and detection was conspicuously missing in those innocent days, except of course in the Saturday-afternoon movie serials. When I was twelve years old I met Sherlock Holmes—oh, unforgettable day! The story of our first meeting has been told many times and in many places— how I was ill in bed in my maternal grandfather's house in Brooklyn, how an aunt walked into my cubbyhole of a bedroom and handed me a book she had borrowed from the neighborhood public library—*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes;* how I devoured it in one long, but all too short, reading, and how other Sherlock Holmes stories followed; how I had no inkling then, no premonition that my life's work had been born, and that all the Queen's horses and all the Queen's men couldn't put Ellery together again—no, not after that ghostly hansom cab loomed out of the London Fog, with a twelve-year-old boy clinging by some miracle of literary gymnastics to its back as it rattled off to perilous adventure . . .

After Holmes, the deluge . . .The next detective influence in my life was a three-volume anthology I found in one of my uncle's bookcases. I can see the volumes in my mind's eye now: eye-poppingly large and thick, promising many nights of pleasure and excitement, bound in blue cloth and called—ecstatically!—*Mastertales of Mystery.* These three books, coming at exactly the right time, when I was thirteen, introduced me to short stories by Anna Katharine Green, to Jacques Futrelle's The Thinking Machine (oh, fabulous day!), to Baroness Orczy, and to Arthur B. Reeve's Professor Craig Kennedy.

Shortly after, when I was perhaps fourteen, my father brought home a magazine—a weekly called *Detective Story Magazine.* . . .I was transfixed by its gaudy four-color cover and fascinated by its "modern" stories. I read that copy from first page to last, and couldn't wait for the next issue. Every day, after school, I visited the *(continued p.40)*

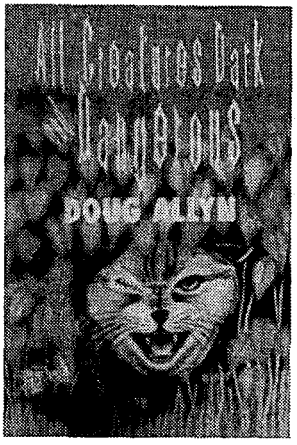
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A *NEW* BOOK BY ELLERY QUEEN!!!

THE TRAGEDY OF ERRORS
AND OTHERS

To recognize Ellery Queen's 70th anniversary, we are honored to publish the 1st new EQ book in a quarter century. It will contain a long scenario for the final, unpublished EQ novel, 6 uncollected short stories, and a section of reminiscences, analyses and tributes by friends, family members, mystery writers and critics. Cloth, collectors edition (ISBN: 1-885941-35-8), $40.00; trade softcover (1-885941-36-6), $16.00. To be published September 1999; copies can be reserved from the publisher now.

BOOKS BY EQMM FAVORITES!!!



Doug Allyn
ALL CREATURES DARK & DANGEROUS:
The Dr. David Westbrook Stories
Trade softcover, $16.00

Ed Gorman
FAMOUS BLUE RAINCOAT:
Mystery Stories
Trade softcover, $16.00
Signed, limited cloth, $40.00

E-mail us at CrippenL@Pilot.Infi.Net; visit our web for audio messages from our authors at www.crippenlandru.com

Order from your mystery bookstore, or from the publisher. Include $2.25 s/h for the 1st book, $1.00 each additional. Virginia residents include 4.5 % sales tax.
CRIPPEN & LANDRU, P.O.B. 9315, DEPT. E, NORFOLK VA 23505

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE THREE WIDOWS

by Ellery Queen

To the normal palate the taste of murder is unpleasant. But Ellery is an epicure in these matters and certain of his cases, he deposes, possess a flavor which lingers on the tongue. Among these dangerous delicacies he places high "The Case of the Three Widows."

Two of the widows were sisters: Penelope, to whom money was nothing, and Lyra, to whom it was everything; consequently, each required large amounts of it. Both having buried thriftless husbands at an early age, they returned to the Murray Hill manse of their father with what everyone suspected was relief, for old Theodore Hood was generously provided with the coin of the Republic and he had always been indulgent with his daughters. Shortly after Penelope and Lyra repossessed their maiden beds, however, Theodore Hood took a second wife, a cathedral-like lady of great force of character. Alarmed, the sisters gave battle, which their stepmother grimly joined. Old Theodore, caught in their crossfire, yearned only for peace. Eventually he found it, leaving a household inhabited by widows exclusively.

One evening not long after their father's death, Penelope the plump and Lyra the lean were summoned by a servant to the drawing room of the Hood pile. They found waiting for them Mr. Strake, the family lawyer.

Mr. Strake's commonest utterance fell like a sentence from the lips of a judge; but tonight, when he pronounced, "Will you be seated, ladies?" his tone was so ominous that the crime was obviously a hanging one. The ladies exchanged glances and declined.

In a few moments the tall doors squealed into the Victorian

Intricate plots were a hallmark of the Queen mysteries, but in this case—one of the finest in short story form—what must strike the reader is the sheer simplicity of the solution. One wants to groan: But of course! And is that not the highest art of the detective writer—to surprise us with what is right before our eyes? Manfred B. Lee did most of the writing of these stories, while Frederic Dannay plotted: both did a superb job here!

©1950 by Ellery Queen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walls and Sarah Hood came in feebly on the arm of Dr. Benedict, the family physician.

Mrs. Hood surveyed her stepdaughters with a sort of contempt, her head teetering a little. Then she said, "Dr. Benedict and Mr. Strake will speak their pieces, then I'll speak mine."

"Last week," began Dr. Benedict, "your stepmother came to my office for her semiannual checkup. I gave her the usual thorough examination. Considering her age, I found her in extraordinarily good health. Yet the very next day she came down sick—for the first time, by the way, in eight years. I thought then that she'd picked up an intestinal virus, but Mrs. Hood made a rather different diagnosis. I considered it fantastic. However, she insisted that I make certain tests. I did, and she was right. She had been poisoned."

The plump cheeks of Penelope went slowly pink, and the lean cheeks of Lyra went slowly pale.

"I feel sure," Dr. Benedict went on, addressing a point precisely midway between the sisters, "that you'll understand why I must warn you that from now on I shall examine your stepmother every day."

"Mr. Strake," smiled old Mrs. Hood.

"Under your father's will," said Mr. Strake abruptly, also addressing the equidistant point, "each of you receives a small allowance from the income of the estate. The bulk of that income goes to your stepmother for as long as she shall live. But at Mrs. Hood's demise, you inherit the principal of some two million dollars, in equal shares. In other words, you two are the only persons in the world who will benefit from your stepmother's death. As I've informed both Mrs. Hood and Dr. Benedict, if there is a single repetition of this ghastly business I shall insist on calling in the police."

"Call them now!" cried Penelope.

Lyra said nothing.

"I could call them now, Penny," said Mrs. Hood with the same faint smile, "but you're both very clever and it might not settle anything. My strongest protection would be to throw the two of you out of this house; unfortunately, your father's will prevents me. Oh, I understand your impatience to be rid of me. You have luxurious tastes which aren't satisfied by my simple way of living. You'd both like to remarry, and with the money you could buy second husbands." The old lady leaned forward a little. "But I have bad news for you. My mother died at ninety-nine, my father at one hundred and three. Dr. Benedict tells me I can live another thirty years, and I have every intention of doing so." She struggled to her feet, still smiling. "In fact, I'm taking certain precautions to make sure of it," she said; and then she went out.

Exactly one week later Ellery was seated beside Mrs. Hood's great mahogany four-poster, under the anxious eyes of Dr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Benedict and Mr. Strake.

She had been poisoned again. Fortunately, Dr. Benedict had caught it in time.

Ellery bent over the old lady's face, which looked more like plaster than flesh. "These precautions of yours, Mrs. Hood—"

"I tell you," she whispered, "it was impossible."

"Still," said Ellery, "it was done. So let's resume. You had your bedroom windows barred and a new lock installed on that door, the single key to which you've kept on your person at all times. You've bought your own food. You've done your own cooking in this room and you've eaten here alone. Clearly, then, the poison could not have been introduced into your food before, during, or after its preparation. Further, you tell me you purchased new dishes, have kept them here, and you and you alone have been handling them. Consequently, the poison couldn't have been put on or in the cooking utensils, china, glassware, or cutlery involved in your meals. How then was the poison administered?"

"That's the problem," cried Dr. Benedict.

"A problem, Mr. Queen," muttered Mr. Strake, "that I thought—and Dr. Benedict agreed—was more your sort of thing than the police's."

"Well, my sort of thing is always simple," replied Ellery, "provided you see it. Mrs. Hood, I'm going to ask you a great many questions. Is it all right, Doctor?"

Dr. Benedict felt the old lady's pulse, and he nodded. Ellery began. She replied in whispers, but with great positiveness. She had bought a new toothbrush and fresh toothpaste for her siege. Her teeth were still her own. She had an aversion to medication and took no drugs or palliatives of any kind. She drank nothing but water. She did not smoke, eat sweets, chew gum, use cosmetics. . . . The questions went on and on. Ellery asked every one he could think of, and then he shook up his brain to think of more.

Finally, he thanked Mrs. Hood, patted her hand, and went out with Dr. Benedict and Mr. Strake.

"What's your diagnosis, Mr. Queen?" asked Dr. Benedict.

"Your verdict," said Mr. Strake.

"Gentlemen," said Ellery, "when I eliminated her drinking water by examining the pipes and faucets in her bathroom and finding they hadn't been tampered with, I'd ruled out the last possibility."

"And yet it's being administered orally," snapped Dr. Benedict. "That's my finding and I've been careful to get medical corroboration."

"If that is a fact, Doctor," said Ellery, "then there is only one remaining explanation."

"What's that?"

"Mrs. Hood is poisoning herself. If I were you I would call in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a psychiatrist. Good day!"

Ten days later Ellery was back in Sarah Hood's bedroom. The old lady was dead. She had succumbed to a third poisoning attack.

On being notified, Ellery had promptly said to his father, Inspector Queen, "Suicide."

But it was not suicide. The most painstaking investigation by police experts, utilizing all the resources of criminological science, failed to turn up a trace of the poison, or of a poison container or other possible source, in Mrs. Hood's bedroom or bath. Scoffing, Ellery went over the premises himself. His smile vanished. He found nothing to contradict either the old lady's previous testimony or the findings of the experts. He grilled the servants. He examined with remorseless efficiency Penelope, who kept weeping, and Lyra, who kept snarling. Finally, he left.

It was the kind of problem which Ellery's thinking apparatus, against all the protests of his body, cannot let alone. For forty-six hours he lived in his own head, fasting and sleepless, ceaselessly pacing the treadmill of the Queen apartment floor. In the forty-seventh hour Inspector Queen took him by the arm and put him to bed.

"I thought so," said the Inspector. "Over one hundred and one. What hurts, son?"

"My whole existence," mumbled Ellery; and he submitted to aspirins, an ice bag, and a rare steak broiled in butter.

In the middle of the steak he howled like a madman and clawed at the telephone.

"Mr. Strake? Ellery Queen! Meet me at the Hood house immediately!—yes, notify Dr. Benedict!—yes, now I know how Mrs. Hood was poisoned!"

CHALLENGE TO THE READER: *You now have all the facts. Pause and consider: How was Mrs. Hood poisoned?*

And when they were gathered in the cavern of the Hood drawing room Ellery peered at plump Penelope and lean Lyra and he croaked: "Which one of you is intending to marry Dr. Benedict?"

And then he said, "Oh, yes, it has to be that. Only Penelope and Lyra benefit from their stepmother's murder, yet the only person who could physically have committed the murder is Dr. Benedict. . . . Did you ask how, Doctor?" asked Ellery.

"Why, very simply. Mrs. Hood experienced her first poisoning attack the day after her semiannual medical checkup—by you, Doctor. And thereafter, you announced, *you would examine Mrs. Hood every day.* There is a classic preliminary to every physician's examination of a patient. I submit, Dr. Benedict," said Ellery with a smile, "that you introduced the poison into Mrs. Hood's mouth on the very thermometer with which you took her temperature." ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOE R. LANSDALE

is an immense talent. There's something special going on here, and it ought not to be missed." ***Booklist***

Waltz of Shadows

by Joe R. Lansdale

ON SALE NOW!

An original, never-before-published suspense novel by the author of the acclaimed Hap and Leonard series (*Rumble Tumble, The Two-Bear Mambo*). *Waltz of Shadows* is available only in this deluxe, autographed hardcover edition.

$50.00

Coming Soon:

Free shipping in the U.S. if ordered now.

Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man

by Lawrence Block

The rarest novel by the author of the Matt Scudder series, virtually out of print for over 25 years! Coming soon in an affordable trade paperback edition. $16

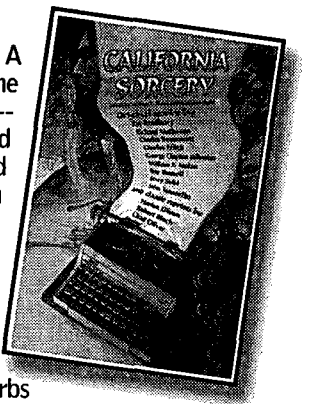
Check or money order to:
Subterranean Press
PO Box 190106
Burton, MI 48519 USA

Visa/MC orders:
Call 1-410-569-5683

SUBTERRANEAN PRESS

CALIFORNIA SORCERY

edited by William F. Nolan & William Schafer. A landmark anthology of dark fiction celebrating the acclaimed "West Coast School of Writers" -- featuring original stories by Ray Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, Ray Russell, and many others. Plus classic reprints by Harlan Ellison, Robert Bloch, and Chad Oliver. Signed by the editors, a full-cloth hardcover, with a brand new historical Introduction, individual story notes and a special photo section. $40 postpaid.



THE POKER CLUB

by Ed Gorman A weekly poker game in the suburbs becomes an urban nightmare when the middle-class players accidentally kill an intruder whose shadowy friends vow vengeance after the poker players throw the victim's body in the river. A classic cat-and-mouse story of ever-mounting suspense from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine reader favorite Ed Gorman! Full-cloth hardcover, signed bythe author. $40 postpaid.

CEMETERY DANCE PUBLICATIONS
P.O. Box 943 • Abingdon, MD 21009

Visa/MC Orders • (410) 569-5683
Email: cdancepub@aol.com

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE! — cemeterydance.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art by Mark Evans

THE ICE SHELF

by Clark Howard

The helicopter pilot tapped Patrick Drake's shoulder and pointed downward out the port-side window.

"There it is, Doc. That's the Brandon Ice Shelf."

Drake looked down on a plateau of frozen gravel surrounded on three sides by blue-white glaciers, and on the fourth, three thousand feet below it, by the frigid waters of the Antarctic Circle.

"Little different from Tahiti, huh, Doc?" the pilot said with a wicked grin.

"Little bit," Drake allowed.

"Say, what's a big-shot biologist like you coming up here for, anyway?" the pilot asked. "I thought biologists studied trees and plants and things. Nothing green up here for hundreds of miles."

"Doesn't have to be green," Drake replied. "Biology is the science of life. Any living organism. Doesn't have to be a plant or even an animal. It can be algae, fungus, anything." With one gloved fingertip, he wiped a tiny spot of mold from the instrument panel. "This is alive," he said.

©1999 by Clark Howard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The pilot shrugged dubiously. "Say, did you know there's two women on the team down there? One's about a four, the other's an eight, easy. Trouble is, the eight's married. But not to worry, after you been down there awhile, the four'll start looking like a ten."

Drake suppressed a smile. "I won't be there that long."

"Say, Doc, do the gals in Tahiti really run around topless, like in the movies?"

"Just the ones under thirty," Drake told him.

"Damn!" said the pilot. "What the hell am I doing down here close to the South Pole?" Sighing in disgust, he pointed down again and added, "Well, there's the blockhouse and tent city, Doc. Have you on the ground in about ten minutes."

Multiple Edgar award nominee and multiple Edgar award winner, Clark Howard added another jewel to his crown recently with his seventh nomination for best short story from the Mystery Writers of America. The honored story: "The Halfway Woman," *EQ* 2/98. Known for his dramatic depictions of man confronted with untamable nature, Mr. Howard now chooses his most daring setting yet: the forbidding reaches of Antarctica.

The International Science Foundation research team was housed in a dozen small thermal tents pitched in a loose circle around a cement-walled Quonset hut with a fiberglass-lined corrugated steel roof. Half of the permanent building held two huge generators fueled by natural-gas tanks behind the structure. The rest of it was divided into a laboratory, offices, storage rooms, and a recreation/dining area with a small kitchen.

When Drake lugged his duffel bag inside and set it down, he was met by a thin woman with stringy, dishwater-blond hair, wearing glasses. "Hi," she said, extending a hand. "Sally Gossett. Welcome to what we call the blockhouse. I have the inside duty today. And I'm the four, in case you're wondering."

"Hello. I wasn't wondering." He shook her hand. "I'm Pat Drake."

"It's an honor to meet you, Dr. Drake." She tilted her head an inch. "Think you can save the project?"

"I'll try. How cold is it out there anyway?"

"We're having a little heat wave. It's twelve."

"Above or below?"

She smiled wryly. "Below. We don't measure above. Take off your gear and come on back to the rec room. I've got coffee on."

Drake zipped off his outer thermal suit and walked back into the rec room wearing threadbare jeans and a brightly flowered Polynesian shirt.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Didn't have time to shop, huh?" Sally said, eyeing the shirt.

"Didn't have time to change," he explained. "The foundation had the duffel waiting for me in Ushuaia; I imagine there are some more suitable clothes in it." He accepted the mug of coffee she offered. "What's your specialty, Dr. Gossett?" he asked.

"Nematodes," she said. Drake nodded. Microscopic worms in a dry, almost lifeless state of anhydrobiosis. "The others will be in from the field any time now," Sally said. "Didn't the foundation give you a background list on us?" he said.

"It's probably in the duffel with my assignment papers and contract," he said.

Just then the front door opened and two men entered and began shedding their thermals. When they were down to corduroys and flannel shirts, they walked back toward Drake and Sally.

"Looks like the *Bounty* has docked," said one, a round-faced little man who swaggered, but smiled at Drake's shirt.

"Either that, or summer's here at last," replied the other, a big, bearded man who lumbered, but also smiled.

"Edward Latham, ecology," said the shorter one. "It's an honor, Dr. Drake."

"Paul Green, geology," said the bigger man. "Likewise."

Drake shook hands with both of them.

Within the next few minutes, two other members of the expedition returned from their day in the field. Harley Neil, a slight, academic-looking young man, was a glaciologist, and Emil Porter, tall and hawkish, was the team's medical doctor. Bottles of scotch, gin, and vodka were produced and cocktails poured all around in metal cups. The first sips were barely taken when two final people came in and Drake heard a voice say, "Hello, Pat."

He didn't have to turn around to know who it was. The voice was one he had heard dozens of times on lazy mornings and soft rainy afternoons, and hundreds of times in subsequent dreams. Turning, he looked at a pale redhead with freckles going down the front of a scoop-necked sweatshirt, and a set of direct, tawny eyes that, as always, riveted him.

"Claire," he said. "Hello. I had no idea you were up here."

"Didn't the foundation give you a background list?" she asked.

"It's probably in my duffel," he said. "The assignment came up so quickly, I haven't had a chance to look at the specs."

"Pat, this is my husband—" Claire began, but she was not quick enough and the man with her stepped forward without offering his hand and said, "I'm Owen Foster. Biology, same as you. And team leader. I've heard a lot about the famous Dr. Patrick Drake."

"You have me at a disadvantage then, Dr. Foster," Drake said

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

evenly, lowering the hand he had half offered. "I haven't heard of you at all."

A moment of stony silence followed, after which Foster smirked and turned to pour drinks for himself and his wife. Then he looked back at Drake and said, "I take it you're here to rescue us from our inefficiency?"

"I'm here to speed up the schedule if I can," Drake said, "before the expedition funding runs out. If there's a problem with inefficiency, I wasn't told about it. Is there?"

"Perhaps you should determine that for yourself," Foster said, shrugging. "Are you officially taking over the team?"

"My contract and specific assignment are in my duffel," Drake said. "Perhaps I'd better go read it before getting into any details." Quickly swallowing what was left of the gin in his metal cup, Drake looked at Sally Gossett and said, "Since you've got the duty today, how about showing me where I bunk."

"Sure, glad to." Sally put down her own cup, warning, "Nobody touch that."

She and Drake dressed in thermals and she led him outside and across the frozen brown gravel to a small, single-occupancy arctic dome tent with an insulated floor, furnished with a cot, camp chair, small desk, and utility storage wall with drawers. A natural-gas camp stove was already burning.

"Heat and electricity never go off," Sally told him. "Sleeping bag on the cot has quad-flaps, depending on how warm-blooded you are. Snacks, liquor, and other goodies are in the drawers there. Direct phone line connects you to the other tents and the blockhouse; there's a list of numbers next to it."

She paused, out of breath, but managed to get in, "So, where do you know Claire from?"

"University of Minnesota," Drake replied, unzipping his parka. "We were on several projects together over about a four-year period."

"I take it you didn't know she was married to Foster?"

"I didn't know she was married to anybody. She was Claire Dunn when I knew her."

"She still goes by Dr. Claire Dunn," Sally said. "Her husband doesn't like that much; he wants her to be Dr. Claire Dunn-Foster, with a hyphen. I think I should warn you: He's very possessive."

"I appreciate the courtesy," Drake said, "but there's no need for it. I'm up here to do a job and get back home to Tahiti as soon as I can. I have no time for personalities."

"Okay, you're the boss. I think you are, anyway. I'm on duty until nine if you need anything. If not, breakfast is at six. Everybody cooks their own. Except Foster, of course. Claire cooks for him. See you when I see you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thanks, Sally."

When he was alone, Drake opened the duffel and found his assignment packet from the foundation. With the official letter of contract and statement of what he was expected to accomplish was a list of the other members of the expedition and their education and experience backgrounds. Her name was at the top of the alphabetical list: DUNN, CLAIRE MARIE; B.S., UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN; M.S., UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA; DOCTORATE, UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING. BIOLOGIST. SPECIALTY: WILDLIFE.

Drake shook his head wryly. There was a time, he thought, when that specialty could have been two words instead of one. Wild life. He wondered if she had changed much.

At six the next morning, Drake fried himself sausage and eggs in the blockhouse, ate breakfast with the entire expedition team, then selected a place where he could face them all, and rose to address them.

"As of today, I am the team leader," he announced, handing Owen Foster an envelope containing a letter relieving him of that responsibility and authority. "I want to make it clear that the reason for this change is not to be interpreted as a reflection of Dr. Foster's competence or capability; rather, because he is one of the two certified ice divers on the team, it is to relieve him of planning and administrative duties to free him up for more diving."

Pouring himself a second cup of coffee, Drake shuffled through a sheaf of papers he had brought over from his tent. "Let's look at an overview of the expedition together and see exactly what it is we're facing here," he suggested. "The purpose of this expedition is to try and determine whether the section of the Antarctic ice sheet known as the Brandon Ice Shelf is, because of global warming, beginning to melt faster than previous melting measurements have indicated. If it is melting faster, then, as all of you know, because the Antarctic ice sheets hold about seventy percent of the Earth's fresh water, the premature melting could mix that fresh water with ocean water and raise sea levels by several feet instead of several inches per year. Such an eventuality would submerge coastlines around the world.

"The governments of the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Sweden, and others are not convinced that this is actually occurring, but are precautionary enough to admit that it *could* be. A coalition of a number of coastal countries has therefore contributed to funding this expedition through the International Science Foundation, which in turn put together a team comprised of the seven of you—and I want to interject here that last night I read all of your backgrounds and qualifications, and I'd like you to know individually and collectively that I have never

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

encountered a better, more qualified scientific team than this one. You are an exceptional group, and if any scientists in the world can prove or disprove this premature-melting theory, it is all of you. I consider it a privilege to be working with you."

There was a big grin from Sally Gossett, a slight sneer from Owen Foster, and an exchange of pleased smiles between the others. Drake continued.

"The problem the expedition currently faces is that of diminishing funds and, consequently, abbreviated time to complete the work and establish findings that will either prove or disprove the premature-melting theory. When the money runs out, the time runs out. So the team either speeds up, works harder, and brings its results in, as they say in the common world of business, under budget, or the team fails, the project is written off, and the world's coastal countries, if our theories are sound, face almost certain future swamping. In the latter instance, we go back to our scientific lives with our individual reputations more than a little tarnished. On the other hand, if we succeed, and if we are correct, somewhere down this icy road may lie a shared Nobel prize for scientific achievement."

On that note, Drake paused, studying the expressions of intense interest and excitement that spread over their faces at the mention of the magic words: *Nobel prize.* Sally's grin faded to a determined line, Claire's brown eyes raised to a compelling stare, even Owen Foster's sneer gave way to something less caustic.

"What do you want us to do, chief?" asked Paul Green, the big, bearded geologist.

"I want everybody to go into ultra-high gear out in the field," Drake said firmly. "Last night I read all of the overview reports on the project to date, and in my opinion this theory is going to be resolved in five ways: studies in the changes in Sally's freeze-dried worms; analysis by you, Paul, of ancient volcano ash that you find trapped between the ice layer and the water beneath it; comparison by you, Claire, of the changes in algae, fungi, and bacteria colonizing damp spaces under lichen layers; and by you, Ed, of microorganisms which, because of possible warming, may now be flourishing instead of merely surviving. And lastly, very importantly, the proofs you four find will be locked in by undeniable evidence of changes in algae now known to be living in microbial mats under the ice shelf itself—and that evidence will be brought up by you, Harley, our glaciologist, and by Dr. Foster, who are the team's ice divers.

"What I want, what this expedition *needs,* is longer hours in the field, more samples collected, more analysis of those samples, and more dives to bring up under-shelf life. In other words, maximum performance from each of you—beginning today."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Owen Foster cleared his throat. "What, may I ask, will be your contribution to this effort, Dr. Drake?"

"I will work alternately with each of you, depending on your daily needs, and will assist and advise when and where I deem it necessary. That answer your question?"

Foster nodded brusquely. "No offense," he said with mock pleasantness. "Just want to be sure you have enough to occupy your time."

Drake saw Claire blush slightly, and ignored it as if he had not noticed. So, he thought, she's told him. He paced back and forth several times, sipping his coffee, then turned to face them again. "Can we do it?" he asked, flatly and finally.

"I sure can," Sally Gossett announced. "The thought of a Nobel prize almost gives me an orgasm."

"We can *all* do it," said big Paul Green.

"Bet your ass we can," seconded little Ed Latham.

Drake turned to Harley Neil, the glaciologist/ice diver. "Any problem on the diving end?"

"Not from me," replied the slight, academic-looking young man. He looked at Foster. "How about you, Owen?"

"I'll carry my weight," Foster assured him.

Emil Porter, the team's medical doctor, spoke up next. "I am obliged to point out, Dr. Drake, that your 'high-gear' schedule involving longer hours out in the elements, more dives under pressurized conditions, and less rest and recreational time, may well affect the health of individual members. Do you understand that it is my responsibility to see that they aren't pushed too far, too hard?"

"Certainly," said Drake. "I was about to address that. I'd like to work with you today on matters of diet, increased vitamins, scheduled hours of relaxation and sleep, and anything else you recommend. I fully appreciate your concerns, Doctor, and am in accord with them."

"Very good," said Porter. "I'm pleased to hear that."

Drake waited a moment, then said, "All right, if there's nothing else, you're all excused to go into the field as previously scheduled by Dr. Foster. Ed, I'll relieve you of block duty so you can also go out. Beginning tomorrow, there will be new schedules posted based on what Dr. Porter and I work out today. Come in at the regular time and we'll have an open discussion session tonight to finalize our new approach. See you all then."

Following a shuffling of feet and rustling of thermals, everyone went out into the stark South Pole day, leaving Drake and the medical doctor behind.

"How do you think it went?" Drake asked candidly.

"Very well," replied Emil Porter. "Very well, indeed."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I hope they can do it," said Drake. "There's a rough road ahead. It's going to take dedication from every single one of them to accomplish this."

"I believe you'll get that dedication, Dr. Drake, I really do."

Drake smiled slightly and nodded. "Okay, let's you and I go to work."

Drake put in place a new schedule of increased workload that was enthusiastically received by the team members, including grudging acceptance by Owen Foster. In order to show the ex-team leader that he was sincere about his own field performance, he took over dive-technician responsibilities the first day in order to allow Foster and Harley Neil to dive at the same time, instead of one of them always remaining on the surface.

The dive site was about midway out on the ice shelf, a considerable distance from where the frozen gravel ended and an ice plateau began. On three sides of the flat were walls of ice as high as Niagara Falls, while on the open side was a sheer ice wall dropping three thousand feet to Antarctic waters. They were the same walls of ice Drake had viewed from the helicopter. Then, however, it had all looked like a picture postcard. Down here, up close and surrounding, it was more like an awesome, frightening world in which humans did not belong.

A small thermal tent served as dive headquarters, with the dives themselves being accomplished through a circular hole in the shelf that was ten feet in diameter and had been cut, with chainsaws, fourteen feet down to the underside of the shelf, where capped water was met.

"What's the water temperature down there?" Drake asked as he helped the two men dress in dry suits and attach pressure hoses.

"Just below the shelf it's warmer than the air up here," Harley Neil replied. "Naturally, the deeper you go, the colder it gets. I think we've both reached forty below, haven't we, Owen?"

"Just over forty, actually," said Foster. He studied Drake for a moment. "You're sure you're familiar with this equipment?"

"Positive," Drake assured him. "McCullough pressurizer," he pointed out, "Warren lowering rig, McKee oxygen supply," his finger indicated every apparatus at the site, "cable pulls, generator, backup generator, underwater lantern, electrical batteries, radio intercom. Don't worry, Dr. Foster, I'll get you back up."

As Foster shuffled over to get his dive helmet, Drake said to Harley, "You apprehensive too?"

The young glaciologist grinned. "Not me. I love it below the shelf. I feel at home down there. It's very peaceful. When I die, I'd rather die down there than from cancer or some horror like that up here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The last place in the world, Drake thought, that this young man looked like he ought to be was in an ice-diving dry suit. Teaching fourth grade somewhere, maybe, but not getting ready to go down a fourteen-foot hole in an Antarctic ice shelf. Drake smiled and patted the younger man on the back.

Foster and Neil dove to forty-four feet that day, found a microbial mat, which was an underwater colony of black algae formed protectively around itself, part of which they scooped up and gathered into break-proof glass tubes to bring back to the surface. It was a successful first-time dive together for the two men, and Drake raised them back to the surface of the shelf without incident.

The following day, Drake worked in the field with big Paul Green, climbing dark, bare crags that rose from the frozen gravel floor to isolated peaks and pinnacles above, to collect rock samples that the bearded geologist praised as if they were nuggets of solid gold.

"Man, look at this little baby," he would say reverently, digging out a rock that had on the underside of its bland gray surface layers of splendid yellow, blue, and orange. "This little sweetheart has been kept cold and dry for a million years, Dr. Drake."

"Call me Pat, please," said Drake. "Good specimen?"

"One of the best I've found," said Green, putting it gently into his waist pack.

On another day, out with Sally Gossett, Drake was moved by the great passion the young woman had for the remote life that was the subject of her work. Using soft tweezers to remove one tiny, curved, yellow bit of microorganism from within a few grains of sandstone, she said almost in a whisper, "Look, Dr. Drake. This tiny fragment of life may be tens of thousands of years old. Can you believe that? It's always hungry, always cold, lives in continuous misery, yet it *survives.*"

"Tell me how," Drake asked, although he already was reasonably certain.

"Well," Sally said quietly, "it gets a little bit of natural light every day for an atom of energy, a trace of moisture from the ocean air, and is able to extract an incredibly minuscule bit of mineral from the sandstone for sustenance. And with just that it's able to survive longer than the oldest, strongest tree in any forest in the world."

Drake nodded quietly. This young woman, he thought, was not a four on *any* scale.

After a week, it was clear that the expedition results had increased by a marked percentage, and, according to Dr. Porter, had done so without any adverse health effects on any individual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

team member. The medical doctor had established a nightly recreation period which required cards, checkers, and trivia games rather than simply sitting around talking while consuming scotch and gin.

"More mental relaxation and less alcohol consumption results in better overall function the next day," Porter explained. He also established a short calisthenics routine before breakfast every morning. "Wakes up the endorphins in the brain that are the foundation for feelings of good physical and mental well-being," he said.

Team members, even Owen Foster, went along with everything the medical doctor suggested. And Drake knew why. The magic spun by Alfred Nobel loomed tantalizingly before them. That and their own professionalism. Still, it almost seemed too easy to him, too smooth. He wondered if it would last. He soon found out.

Drake was alone, working on a routine report to the foundation, when his tent phone rang one night.

"Drake here," he answered.

"Pat, it's Claire. Is it okay if I drop over and talk to you for a few minutes?"

He could not help hesitating before answering, and it gave her the opportunity to reinforce her request.

"It'll be all right, Pat. All the men are in a poker game, and Sally's watching a video movie. Just for a few minutes, Pat, please." She seemed to force a lightness into her voice. "Listen, I promise not to even take off my thermals."

"All right, Claire," he said. "Come on over."

She was there in less than five minutes, out of breath when she removed her hood and face mask, creating old desires in Drake as she shook out her red hair.

"I ran over to turn on the light in Owen's and my tent in case he misses me and looks out the window."

"Claire, I'm not sure this is smart," Drake said, curbing the warm feeling in the pit of his abdomen.

"It probably isn't, but it's necessary, Pat. Look, I'm having a real problem with Owen. He knows about us; our past, I mean. It was stupid, but I told him. I have this thing about honesty in a marriage. I thought he would just consider the past to be the past. But he's becoming more unreasonable and suspicious every day."

"That's ridiculous, Claire. There's no basis for any suspicion. This is the first time I've even been alone with you since I arrived. I've made a point of only doing field and lab work with you when there was another team member present—"

"I know that, Pat. And you know it. But Owen doesn't—not when he's in the water forty or fifty feet under the ice shelf." She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

put a hand on his arm. "Pat, I'm telling you this for the sake of the project. I know Owen. He's volatile and he's got a short fuse. He could blow up over this and ruin the entire expedition."

With her standing close enough to touch his arm, Drake saw that perspiration had broken on her brow and upper lip.

"Take off your thermals," he said. "If you don't, you'll catch pneumonia when you step back outside."

"Thanks," Claire said with relief, unzipping her sleeves and pant legs to shed the heat-producing outer garb. She sat on the side of the bunk and Drake immediately wished she had taken the camp chair instead. "Listen, can I have one of those little bottles of gin, Pat? I'm very nervous."

He opened a small pantry on the utility storage wall and twisted the top off a jigger-size bottle of Bombay. He was looking around for a clean cup when she took it out of his hand.

"That's okay," she said, and drank it straight from the miniature bottle. When it was down, she smiled and fixed her brownish orange eyes on him in a way that still, after all the years, beguiled him. "Reminds me of when we used to lie in front of the fireplace and sip wine from the same bottle on those icy Sunday afternoons back in Minnesota." Instantly then, her expression became dejected. "God, Pat, whatever happened to us?"

Drake shook his head dismally. "I don't know, Claire. Time passes, people change, life paths turn in other directions." He sat down on the bunk and put an arm around her shoulders. "But you've done all right, Claire. You've got your doctorate and you're married to someone in your field of interest. I must tell you that I've found Owen to be a really exceptional scientist—"

"The only thing Owen is exceptional at," Claire snapped, "is being a world-class son of a bitch." She rose and quickly unbuttoned her flannel shirt. "Would you like to see my bruises, Pat? They're all recent, since you got here. He only hits me on the body so it won't show—"

Drake stood and put his arms around her. "Don't, please, Claire. It's not necessary. I believe you. What can I do to help?"

"I don't know." She shook her head against his chest. "I'm not sure there's anything either of us can do. What is, is. We just have to get through it." Backing away from him, she rebuttoned her shirt and reached for her thermals. "I'd better go, Pat. I'm sorry about this. I just wanted to warn you for the sake of the project." Her eyes softened and she lightly touched his cheek with her fingertips. "I would very much like to see you become a Nobel laureate in science, Dr. Patrick Drake. I would be so proud."

Before he knew it, she was gone, and he was left with the fresh memory of her breasts against his chest. And the thought that they might have bruises on them from the fists of Owen Foster.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

❖ ❖ ❖

The next day, Drake worked with Ed Latham, the swaggering but smiling little geologist. They climbed up to, then out upon, one of the lower promontory glaciers that formed the high walls around the shelf. There, protected by wind panels they put up, they laboriously and methodically used hand-held razor rakes to scrape away layer after layer of ice until, about three feet down, they encountered a strain of light rust running parallel to the surface.

"Iron," said Latham. "We're close to something."

Carefully, he scraped past the redness, dismissing it as scientifically worthless, and dug a few more inches until he reached a second strain that was black as tar.

"Ah, this is what we want," he said jovially.

"Ash?" asked Drake.

"Yep. Very old ash. From some ancient volcano that used to be here. It got trapped between the ice layer and the water underneath, and froze so quickly that it's been preserved ever since. Would you hold this collection jar for me, Dr. Drake?"

"Certainly. And call me Pat, please."

After their climb down, and on the walk back, Drake was staring distractedly out at the starkness of the shelf when Latham asked, "So how are we doing, Pat?"

"I'm sorry, what?" Drake said, when Latham's voice got through his reverie.

"I asked how we're doing. You know, the team. Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Just a little tired today. We're doing splendidly, Ed. Better than I hoped."

Except, he thought, for those bruises on Claire's body.

When they got back to the blockhouse, they found that the gin and scotch had been broken out early by the rest of the team, who were in an exuberant mood over what Owen Foster had collected under the ice shelf on his dive that day.

"Look at these, Pat!" Sally all but screeched, running to him with an underwater collection tube. "Look what Owen found! Look at the color of these!"

Examining the jar, Drake detected, among a small cluster of black algae, several that were not completely black, but rather bluish black. Where did you find them?" Drake asked.

"It'll all be in my report, Doctor," Foster said with smug aloofness.

Drake, thoughts of Claire's bruises still circulating, took a step forward, eyes narrowing, and said, "Don't get cute with me, Foster, or I'll have you on the next goddamned helicopter out of here. Now where'd you find them?"

"Forty-nine feet down," Foster said tightly, his own eyes darkening in anger. "There's a microbial mat down there that's definitely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

different from the earlier ones Harley and I have found. It's—I don't know, a *tighter* mat, more closely formed—"

"Maybe to protect this lighter species," Claire offered.

"Protect it from what?" Owen snapped, throwing her an annoyed look.

"From warmth that it's not used to," Sally interjected. "From warmth that it's never felt, and is instinctively frightened of."

"Of course," Drake said, almost speaking to himself. "Warmth coming from far down. So far down that the water is warmer—"

Now Owen Foster's expression became excited. "Because global warming is pushing heavier warm water *under* the ice cap—"

"—and it's gradually working its way upward," Drake finished the thought for him.

"I'll be damned," Ed Latham whispered.

"Me too," agreed Paul Green. The big bear of a man and his smaller friend slapped hands like a couple of basketball players.

A silence came over the group then, only momentary, but as if dictated by some higher plane of feeling that somehow governed them all individually and as a group. It was almost religious, perhaps even divine. For a split instant of time, they were like apostles who suddenly found themselves in the presence of their god.

Finally, Drake stepped over and poured a drink for himself. He raised it in a toast.

"Colleagues," he said, "I think this is our breakthrough."

Drake worked up a new schedule that night, focusing entirely on the latest evidence gathered from Owen Foster's dive. Sally, Claire, and Ed Latham were assigned exclusively to laboratory duty, running full-spectrum tests on the new blue-black algae. Porter, the medical doctor, took over block duty and pitched in to help in the preparation of reports. Foster and Harley Neil increased their diving-schedule depth by decreasing the time spent underwater. Drake and big Paul Green worked together as dive techs to expedite the submersions, decreasing dive prep time, and shuttling fresh samples back to the blockhouse lab.

"Keep a tight rein on the dive times and depths, Pat," Porter cautioned the next morning as the four men prepared to leave for the dive site.

"I will, Emil," Drake assured the tall, hawkish man. "I'm not going to blow this by being overanxious, believe me."

By noon that day, Harley Neil had returned to the surface with more bluish black algae, this sampling containing an even lighter blue cast than the previous day's find.

"How far down?" Drake asked.

"Fifty-two feet," the young diver replied.

When Foster came up a little while later from fifty-five feet, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bluish tint was lighter still. A subsequent dive by both men that afternoon, down to fifty-nine feet, produced for the first time a *greenish* black sample.

"They're getting lighter," Owen Foster said elatedly as he and Harley sat through routine medical exams by Emil Porter at the end of the day.

"Definitely," Harley agreed. "I just wish there was some way we could get around the random gathering and be more selective in what we catch—"

"Maybe there is," Foster said. "Why not each take a second lantern for more light? That way we'll be able to better distinguish color down there."

"But what about the weight? A second lantern, I don't know—"

"We can handle the weight," Foster said confidently.

Drake cut into the conversation, saying, "You may be able to handle it, but I'm not so sure about the generators supplying the power. I don't want them running hot. Let's not rush this, okay?"

Foster glared at him for a moment, then replied grudgingly, "You're the boss, Drake."

"That's right, I am," Drake said evenly.

And if you don't like it, he thought, *try punching me around.*

The next day, Foster and Neil each made two more dives, the first to sixty-two feet, which prompted Emil Porter, who came out to the dive site for samples, to say to Drake, "This worries me, Pat, diving into the sixties like this."

"It's got to be done, Emil," Drake insisted. "The deeper we go, the lighter the algae we find. We've *got* to follow through on this."

"Then shorten the dives," the doctor said. "More depth, less time down. Compensate."

"Okay, okay. I'll try."

But that afternoon, on the second dive, with both men at sixty-five feet, Drake let the dive run a few minutes longer.

"This is risky, Pat," said Paul Green nervously.

"Just keep it to yourself," Drake said shortly. "This has to be up to Owen and Harley, not us or Emil Porter. They know what they can handle down there."

But as it turned out, one of them did not. Even though the afternoon dive produced the best, lightest-green-pigmented algae yet found, it effectively eliminated Harley Neil from dive duty.

"You're grounded," Dr. Porter announced after the evening physical exam.

"What! Like hell I am!" Harley protested.

"I have the medical authority to keep you out of the water," Porter said flatly. "I'm exercising that authority." He turned to Drake. "I warned you, Pat."

"What's the basis for your decision?" Drake asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Blood alkalinity is down, systolic and diastolic pressure both up, there's some ocular expansion, and the beginning of sinus stricture. That enough for you?" Without waiting for an answer, he turned back to Harley. "No alcohol for twenty-four hours, no diving for forty-eight. Then I'll reevaluate you."

"Damn it, this cuts the dive schedule in half!" Harley pounded the side of his fist on the table.

"No, it doesn't," Drake said. "I'll take your place. I'm certified."

Dr. Porter raised one eyebrow sceptically. "How long has it been since you dived?"

"Awhile. But I *am* certified. Radio the foundation if you don't believe me." He bobbed his chin at Neil. "Harley can work as dive tech, can't he?"

"Of course. He can do anything but go under."

"Harley, do you have specs on the dry suits we're using? And a current dive manual?"

"Sure. I'll get them."

The thought of the next day was already generating bursts of apprehension in Drake's mind. He had not dived in a dry suit in more than five years. Any recent diving he had done had been in a wet suit, with scuba gear, in Polynesian and Australian waters. With that kind of history, the smart way to approach the ice-shelf exploration would have been to spend half an hour at twenty feet the first day, forty-five minutes at thirty-five the second, an hour at fifty feet the third, then try a deeper dive. He was going to have to spend about ninety minutes at sixty-plus feet the first day. It was going to be not only arduous but dangerous.

But, he had already decided, it was necessary. If there was going to be an individual Nobel prize for the diver who found the algae that conclusively proved the theory, maybe *he* would be the one to get it.

Later that night, while Drake was carefully reviewing a schematic of the dry suit's valves and attachments, Owen Foster walked into his tent without knocking.

"Just what the hell are you up to, Drake?" he demanded.

"What are you talking about, Foster? And don't you know how to knock?"

"Never mind knocking! And you know damn well what I'm talking about! You set it up with Porter to replace Harley with yourself to make you the lead diver. You want to be the one who brings up the conclusive algae, don't you?"

"That's absurd," said Drake. "I don't care *who* brings it up, as long as the team gets it—"

"Will you guarantee to let me do the deeper dives first?" Foster challenged.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, I can't do that." Drake tried to reason with him. "If I see something that's deeper than you are, or deeper than you've been, I have to go for it. This is a scientific endeavor, not some kind of contest, Foster—"

"Yeah, right," Foster snapped. "I suppose you're not trying to impress Claire to get her back either?"

"No, I'm not—"

"I suppose you're going to tell me she hasn't been to your tent since you got here?"

"She came to my tent just to talk. She said she was worried about the project—"

"You're a goddamned liar," Foster said. From under his parka he drew a serrated ice knife and brandished it malevolently. "You listen and you listen good, you son of a bitch. You're not getting my wife, and you're not cheating me out of being the one who brings up the algae sample that proves the warming theory. *I* am going to be the one the scientific world applauds for *that. I* am going to be the one whose name goes into the history books, and *I* am going to be the one on this team who gets an *individual* Nobel prize!"

Drake eyed the knife warily. "You're sick, Foster. You need therapy."

"The only thing I need is for you to stay out of my dive depth tomorrow. I'd gut you right now if I wasn't afraid it would terminate the project. But if you dive past me tomorrow, I swear I'll cut your air hose and let you die down there!"

With that, the enraged man turned and stalked out.

No sooner was Foster gone than Drake's tent phone rang. It was Claire.

"Has he been there?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, he just left."

"Pat, I'm frightened. He's losing it. It infuriated him that you were diving with him tomorrow instead of Harley. He's afraid that you're going to be the star now, and he'll be just another team member. Listen, can you come and get me?"

"Come and get you?"

"Just to walk with me from the blockhouse to Sally's tent. Everyone else is already gone. Sally's in a two-person tent and said I could bunk with her tonight. She knows that I'm terrified of Owen. Especially since he believes that—well, you and I, you know—"

"I'll be over in ten minutes," Drake told her.

When Drake got over to the blockhouse, Claire was not dressed to leave, as he had known she would not be. Instead, she was in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little kitchen with coffee poured for both of them. Drake zipped off his thermals and sat down with her.

"How in hell did you ever get mixed up with a psycho like Foster?" he asked without preliminary.

Claire shrugged helplessly. "I don't know," she said sadly. "After you and I broke up, I kind of drifted. I was involved with an aeronautical engineer out in California, until I found out that his fifteen-year-old daughter wasn't his daughter at all, but a runaway he had been keeping in his home for over a year as an extra bed partner. Then there was a faculty head in Colorado who got me dangerously into the drug scene before I came to my senses and got out. In Texas there was a wealthy rancher, who was the father of one of my students at the University of Houston, who swore that he and his wife were on the brink of a divorce, but whose wife eventually came to me and threatened to gouge my eyes out with her spurs if I didn't leave her husband alone." She smiled wistfully. "I just couldn't seem to connect with anyone who came up to your standards, Pat, which was what I was trying to do. I wanted very badly to come back to you, I even tried to find you—"

"I didn't know that," Drake said in surprise.

"It's true. I called everyone we mutually knew to locate you. I was going to beg you to give us another chance together. But when I finally found out where you were, you were engaged to somebody named Cindy or something—"

"Wendy."

"—and the two of you had left for Africa on an agriculture project of some kind. So I dropped my desperate quest and started drifting again. When I met Owen, I was down to my last emotion. Unfortunately, I used it on him." Claire rose and turned off the overhead fluorescents, leaving the little kitchen in subdued countertop light. "Do you mind? I have a raging headache." Walking to the room's only window, she pressed a button to electronically raise the thermal shade, and looked out at the ghostly white moonlit night. Drake rose and came over to stand with her.

"So whatever happened to Cindy?" she asked.

"Wendy. She dumped me for a great white hunter. Some guy who worked as a guide for *National Geographic.*"

"Did you find anyone else?"

"No," he answered quietly. "I didn't try. By then I knew I couldn't replace you."

They were in each other's arms quickly then, moving in tandem away from the window, to the far end of the counter where the light barely reached, and where she could sit up on the countertop and they could open just enough buttons, just enough zippers, move just enough fabric aside for what they both wanted.

"Don't hold me too tight, Pat," she whispered. "My bruises—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

While they were locked together, her head thrown back, his mouth on her throat, Drake made up his mind to kill Owen Foster under the ice shelf the next day.

The dive site the next morning had an unusually ominous aura about it. The frigid air somehow seemed thinner and more difficult to breathe, the stratocumulus clouds looked low enough to reach up and touch, and during the night some extraordinary wave of heat, the kind of phenomenon unique to Antarctica, had thawed an inch of ice on the surface of the shelf to create a slush in which the scientists had to maneuver about. "This is downright spooky," said big Paul Green, shuddering involuntarily. Along with grounded Harley Neil, he was a dive tech this morning.

"Tell me about it," Harley agreed.

The two men got the dive equipment in place and the generators running, tested everything, then went into the ready tent where Drake and Foster, warily facing each other without speaking, were suiting up. They had everything on except helmet, gloves, and the utility belt which held, on one side, rubber cases containing sample-collection tubes, and on the other, an assortment of small tools to facilitate removing ice or rock in which a microbial mat had been formed by algae for protection.

As the two techs checked each suited diver and helped them on with the belt and gloves, Owen Foster said to them, "I want maximum slack today, beginning at sixty-eight feet. Understand?"

"You don't want to push it, Owen," cautioned Harley. "It won't do the project any good if you end up grounded too."

"Just give me the slack," Foster ordered. "I know what I'm doing."

Harley looked to Drake for approval as team leader. Drake nodded. "Give me the same slack," he told Harley.

Outside, at the lip of the ten-foot dive hole down the fourteen-foot icy cylindrical walls, at the bottom of which the men could see the cerulean water the shelf covered, the techs placed on each diver in turn the heavy, globelike helmet through which they would receive air and voice communication from the surface. Each diver sat down on an empty equipment crate and waited patiently as his suit was pressurized and the radio reception checked. Several minutes later, they were ready to go.

"Okay," said Harley, "here's the routine but required safety speech. Your dry suits are safe in water of this temperature to a depth of eighty feet. You will have maximum slack of depth plus twenty feet during this dive to accommodate lateral movement only. The suit environment gauges are in the control panel on your left sleeve just below the elbow. When the panel lid is opened, there is an illuminated digital screen on its underside,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with command buttons for all functions directly under it. Watch your suit pressure and temperature, watch your heart rate, and watch your depth." He gave each of them a double pat on top of their helmet. "Good luck."

Protocol required that Drake enter the water first. With a powerful underwater lantern secured over his right shoulder, he backed up to the hole and laboriously descended a metal ladder spiked to the inside wall. In less than a minute, his heavy, weighted boots reached the water, and seconds later he hand-walked the final few rungs and submerged.

Owen Foster quickly followed him.

For Pat Drake, being in the water under the ice shelf was like diving back into prehistoric time. He had never been in a body of water that large and that deep, yet devoid of visible, moving sea life. He felt almost as if he were in a synthetic world, a place surreal and unnatural. Inside the diving helmet, his eyes were wide with wonder, his lips parted in silent exclamation. The powerful high-intensity, mercury-metallic iodide incandescence of his lantern, spreading from fourteen inches square to a light the size of a small theater screen twenty feet in front of him, illuminated for him a domain that few humans would ever see. Its terrain, much like that above the shelf, was pitched with crags, crevices, and fissures that once had been above the water and walked on by creatures long extinct, perhaps even scientifically unknown.

Drake's reverie was interrupted by the sudden intrusion of a second shaft of light as Owen Foster descended to the level where Drake was treading with one hand on a protrusion of rock. As Foster glided near him, Drake flipped open the control panel on his sleeve and pressed the blue depth button. The digital screen immediately read: 48. He switched on his radio.

"Harley, this is Drake, reporting both divers at forty-eight. Beginning further descent."

When Foster came into Drake's field of light, Drake saw that he had in his hand the serrated knife he had wielded the previous night when he intruded in Drake's tent. Drake trod backward a little along the rock and held his left hand up, palm out, to indicate that he wanted no trouble. He pointed to Foster, then downward with a thumb, signaling for him to take the lead in the dive. Foster pushed off and began to descend.

At fifty-eight feet, Foster paused for several moments. Drake came down to within a few feet of his depth, but kept well away from him in the lateral distance between them. His mind was racing. *I've got to do this,* he told himself, having now admitted to himself that he wanted Claire back, and that the only way for him to get her was for them to be free of Owen Foster. The previous

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night, after he and Claire had left the blockhouse and parted, he had gone to sleep thinking how wonderful it had felt being with her again, touching her, loving her. But later, in a nightmarish dream, he had seen her naked body black and blue from her husband's fists, and he had awakened sweating and angry. It was then that he got out of bed and rummaged in the drawers of the utility wall until he found a box of ice nails. Four inches long, their points needle-sharp, they were used on surface ice and rocks, hammered in as hangers for collection vessels. Selecting one of them, he took the cork from an open bottle of wine he had in the tent, cut off an inch of it to push over the nail's point, and had carried it with him to the dive site that morning. When no one was looking, he slipped it into one of the cases on his dive belt, where it now lay.

Drake reported his depth to the surface again, certain that Foster had done the same, then waited while Foster continued his descent. He saw that Foster still had the knife in one hand, and continued to keep a sensible distance between them. Presently he descended to sixty-five feet and began moving his lantern over a small ridge of crags, looking for signs of mat colonization. He knew that Foster, several feet farther down, could see that Drake was holding back to allow Foster first look in the deeper water. *I'll wait,* he thought, *until he finds something worth collecting, until he begins to concentrate on his job, and then I'll drop silently behind him and puncture his suit with the ice nail—*

Suddenly Drake's attention was caught by several dots of color down the wall of the crag. It manifested in the light for only a split instant, but Drake could have sworn it was a very light green, almost lime in hue. Could it possibly have been algae? he wondered. Algae without any blue or black, which were the colors produced by colder water? Squinting, frowning, he moved deeper, closer into the crags. Glancing over, he saw that he was now several feet farther down than Foster, but Foster's light was pointed away from him now, and Foster seemed to be occupied with his own search.

Momentarily dismissing the other diver from his mind, Drake began to carefully examine the crag area where he thought he had seen the light green color. In only a matter of seconds, he had found it: a microbial mat formed by a multitude of millions, perhaps billions, of microscopic organisms that had to have been, because of their light green color, getting a source of *comparative* warmth from somewhere.

This is it! Drake thought excitedly. *This will be enough to keep the project going, to get more money, deeper diving gear, to let us go far enough down to prove the warming theory—*

"Pat, what's your depth?" he heard Harley's voice from the surface.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Drake flipped open his control panel and pressed the depth button.

"Seventy-one."

"That's deep enough," said Harley. "Run a gauge check."

Drake glanced over at Foster. It looked as if he had moved farther away; his light source was about five feet higher and some twenty feet off to Drake's right. Drake ran the gauge test, pressing a sequence of buttons on his sleeve panel.

"Pressure okay," he reported. "Valves okay. Power okay. Everything's fine, Harley."

"Don't go any deeper, Pat."

"Ten-four."

If I hurry, Drake thought, *I can collect this sample, then take care of Foster on the way up.* Looking over, he saw that Foster's light was still in the same place. Quickly unsnapping a collection tube from his utility belt, he used a sand brush to carefully begin moving the light green algae into the tube. When he felt he had enough, he capped the tube and had just attached it back to the belt when he sensed a presence close to him.

Drake turned just as Owen Foster, without his lantern, loomed up in front of him, serrated knife in hand.

Foster moved toward him. Drake backed off and directed the blazing light of his own lantern directly in Foster's face. Inside Foster's helmet, Drake saw his eyes squint blindly. Even so, Foster continued forward and Drake saw his hand come up and slash the water in front of him with the knife. Frantically, Drake fumbled in his utility pack for the ice nail. Again Foster advanced, again the knife slashed. After what seemed like an eternity, Drake found the heavy nail and thumbed off the piece of protective cork he had put over its needle point. But when Foster's knife hewed close to him a third time, he realized that he could not get past it to use the nail without fatally exposing himself. He had hoped to come up on Foster from behind and puncture his dive suit in one of the armpits, where there was less reinforcement; now that plan had been neutralized by the knife and Foster's unexpected aggression. But Drake knew he had to do something—

In desperation, Drake let himself drop several feet and spun to his right, down and away from the hand that held the knife. Reaching out with the nail, he tried to drive it into one leg of Foster's suit, but could not reach it. Foster cut recklessly with the knife again, slashing downward, and this time the blade struck Drake's helmet and twisted out of Foster's hand. Both Foster and Drake watched the knife float as if in slow motion down out of the light path into darkness and disappear.

Foster regrouped quickly from the loss of his weapon, drew his knees up, and maneuvered over Drake until he was behind him, then lowered himself and locked both legs around the neck of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Drake's helmet. Their combined weight drove them several feet deeper, but that did not concern Drake; he was too relieved by the knowledge that he now had Foster in an irreversible position of vulnerability. Foster no longer had the knife—but Drake still had the ice nail.

Closing his eyes, thinking about Claire, hating this man above him who had beaten her, Drake reached up with the ice nail and pushed its point smartly through the skin of Owen Foster's dry suit.

There was an immediate reduction of weight on Drake as Foster's suit depressurized and the legs locked around Drake's neck went limp. Drake untangled himself from Foster, working down and a few feet away, then held depth, treading.

"Pat, we're getting a depress warning on Owen!" Harley's urgent voice sounded. "Where is he?"

"I can't see him," Drake lied, "but his light is about thirty feet starboard of me and eight feet above. Want me to go over there?"

"Negative! Stay away from his lines! We're bringing him up!"

"Ten-four."

Reaching up, Drake held onto Foster's feet. He felt tension from above as they tried to pull Foster up, but managed to hold on enough to keep him down. They pulled, he held—for a full minute, until Drake's arms began to give out. Then he let go. *Pull him up,* he thought then. *You're bringing up a dead man.*

Suddenly Drake felt very warm and cozy in his own dry suit, very secure and almost lightheaded, now that what he had to do was over. He thought of Claire and the life they would have together, of the Nobel prize he would almost certainly receive—an *individual* prize, too, because *he* would be the one to bring up the first conclusive proof of premature warming. When the expedition was further funded and they got new, deeper dive equipment, he would personally do all the diving; it would be *his* name in the scientific history books—

Almost as if it were a sign, a signal, of his new enthrallment with the future, Drake's peripheral vision picked up something new: a reflection, a gleam, something pinpoint and shiny. It was down five or six feet, over about ten, on the flat facing of an undersea wall. Drake dropped on an angle until he was next to it, and peered out at his finding through the faceplate. His eyes grew wide as they had earlier, but when his lips parted this time it was not in silence.

"I'll be damned," he said aloud.

Inches in front of him was the most beautiful colony of algae he had ever seen. Beautiful yellow algae. Beautiful orange algae. Beautiful *warm* algae. Algae that conclusively proved the expedition's theory.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Pat, Mayday!" Harley's voice reached Drake again. "Mayday, Pat, wake up! What's your depth? Mayday—!"

Drake lazily pressed the depth button on his arm. The digital numbers read: 93.

Seconds later, Drake's lungs turned to ice.

Claire lugged her duffel over to the blockhouse and dropped it just inside the door to take off her thermals. Emil Porter was already there, his own duffel in the same place. They were waiting for the helicopter to return for them, its third trip that morning after taking Ed Latham and Paul Green, then Sally Gossett and Harley Neil, to Ushuaia on two earlier trips. As Claire sat down at one of the card tables, Porter poured a shot of vodka into a cup of tomato juice for her. At the same time, she showed Porter an envelope.

"Sally gave me this before she flew out. Pat left it for me in case anything happened to him under the ice shelf."

"What is it?" Porter asked, sipping his own Bloody Mary.

"A handwritten amendment to a will he has on file back in Minnesota, making me the beneficiary of his foundation dive insurance, and leaving me his beachfront home and laboratory in Tahiti."

Porter raised his eyebrows, impressed. "Well, you said that Pat was as generous and protective as Owen was petty and possessive. Looks like you knew them both pretty well." He tilted his head slightly. "Do you realize what this means, Claire? A million dollars from Owen's dive policy, a million from Pat's, and now the property in Tahiti in addition. You're a wealthy woman."

"Except that I feel a little shabby about what I did to Pat," she confessed.

Porter reached across the table and took her hands. "Don't make a guilt trip out of it, Claire," he said quietly. "What happened to Pat and Owen, they did to themselves. We told a couple of lies: you about having bruises, me about Harley Neil's fitness to dive. We put Pat and Owen under the ice together, that's all. Maybe what happened was over you, maybe it was over a Nobel prize, maybe both. Whatever, it was *their* doing."

From outside came the sound of helicopter rotor blades. Porter rose and gently drew Claire to her feet, pulling her close.

"Look, based on the sample they found on Pat's belt, there'll be a new team up here in thirty days, so our expedition was a success. You and I got what we wanted, each other—plus a lot more, it turns out. Put the past behind you, Claire. Focus on tomorrow. You've waited a long time to be happy again. Enjoy it. With me."

Claire nodded, smiling a slight little smile of solace, and let Porter lead her to the front door to don their thermals.

Moments later, carrying their duffels, they walked together across the great shelf of ice toward the helicopter. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rumpole and the Absence of Body

by John Mortimer

Nearly everyone knows John Mortimer's character Horace Rumpole. Many of the stories readers have read in *EQMM* first saw life as scripts for the TV series shown on BBC and PBS. As *Crime and Mystery Writers* says, "Mortimer paints a wicked picture of the British legal practitioners: the ambitious, indifferent prosecutor; the biased judge . . . " But it is Rumpole's ironic take on ordinary life that makes him unforgettable to this reader. ✝

"What's better than the presence of mind in an accident? Absence of body." So far as I recall, this was my old father's only joke, if you can flatter it by calling it a joke. But when it comes to a trial for murder, the failure of the corpse to put in an appearance can be a considerable embarrassment to all concerned. So it was when the possibly late Charley Twineham failed to turn up, even in phantom form, at Number One Court in the Old Bailey, where his wife, Pauline, commonly known as "Poppy" Twineham, was on trial for his murder.

"Rumpole," my wife Hilda, known to me only as She Who Must Be Obeyed, trumpeted like the recording angel uttering a hostile verdict on the Day of Judgement. "How can you possibly defend that appalling Poppy woman?"

"Perfectly easy," I told her. "You put on the crumpled gown, perch the yellowing wig on your head, stand up, and try to make the prosecution witnesses look silly. Call me old-fashioned, but that's the way it's always worked for me in the past. And in her case the prosecution have completely failed to produce a corpse."

"She did away with him, quite obviously. He's undoubtedly at the bottom of the sea. I can't think how she got you to defend her. Fluttered her eyelashes at you, I suppose. You're such a fool, Rumpole. Where women are concerned."

©1999 by John Mortimer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In fact she was wrong. Poppy's eyelashes were not of the fluttering variety. She was a big, fair-haired, blue-eyed, you might say "beefy" woman who would have been naturally cheerful if she hadn't suffered the handicap of marriage to a smaller, crinkly-haired, devious businessman with protruding teeth who looked, in the photographs we had of him, like one of the smaller and less attractive rodents. The Twinehams had a six-year-old daughter named Charlotte, whom her father always called "Charlie," fondly believing that this child, to whom he gave all the love he denied her mother, was some perfected, far more attractive, and considerably more honest edition of himself.

Occasionally flush with money, often teetering on the verge of bankruptcy, the Twinehams kept a boat in the marina, handy for their cottage in Devon. This "twenty-six footer," as it came to be known among the landlubbers in the Old Bailey, was christened—inappropriately, if it was indeed the setting for a violent marital murder—*Love's Young Dream*. In it Poppy and her husband, unaccompanied by Charlotte, who was staying with a grandmother in Ealing, set sail, one winter morning, to practise for a local regatta. When *Love's Young Dream* returned to port, Poppy was the sole surviving member of the crew. Charley's body was never found and was presumed to be drifting away towards America, feeding fishes in unplumbable depths. Subsequent enquiries led to the arrest of Poppy on the charge of murder and landed me, ten days before Christmas, in the Ludgate Circus Palais de Justice, listening to that opera enthusiast and indifferent advocate, Claude Erskine-Brown, as he opened the prosecution against Hilda's least favourite woman. He presented a case which had every possible evidence of guilt about it except for that one essential—a dead person.

"I am distinctly worried," Claude confided in me as we sat in the Old Bailey canteen, drinking the black and watery brew which came out of the machine that dispensed indistinguishable tea, coffee, or soup. "I can't find enough Humpy Camels." Christmas was coming and that year it wasn't turtles or action men, Teletubbies or Barbie dolls, but a lugubrious family of ruminant quadrupeds who came inappropriately dressed as pop stars, space travellers, or members of famous football teams. Tristram and Isolde, the operatically named offspring of Claude and his wife Phillida, the Portia of our chambers, were then of an age to appreciate such toys. Sadly, Claude had searched some ten shops in vain; in that hectic week before Christmas, Humpies seemed to be all sold out, and Phillida was far too busy to join in the hunt.

"What can I do, Rumpole?" There was a note of desperation in my opponent's voice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Forget Humpy for the moment," I advised that stricken fellow. "Seek relief in some less taxing diversion. Such as the Twineham murder case."

I suppose, in the circumstances, it was not surprising that Claude's opening speech should have been a little distracted, at times incoherent, but the strength of the case against Poppy emerged strongly. Love had clearly died between her and Charley on the morning they took the boat out. When she returned alone, fellow members of the yacht club remembered shouting matches between the couple in which an irate Poppy had often wished her husband dead and had told him that she'd kill him if he got into another financial or amorous scrape, because Charley's ratlike appearance didn't stop him pursuing, and sometimes even catching, other women. She discussed, with various "friends," cases in which wives who had done in their husbands escaped because of extreme provocation. Further police searches revealed Poppy's diaries, to which she had confided her frequent temptations to enter a happy state of premature widowhood. Charley had left a sample of blood during the checkup at the doctor's, and his group was found to correspond to bloodstains on a heavy winch handle on board the good ship *Love's Young Dream,* and on the life jacket Poppy was wearing at the time of her husband's disappearance. It was the prosecution case that Poppy, taller and beefier than her husband, had stunned him with the winch handle and pushed him overboard. The boat wasn't far out when he vanished, and if he had fallen in by accident he might well have been able to swim ashore.

Poppy's account was rather different. It was true that she had quarrelled with her husband on the high seas, some dispute about an alien pair of knickers found in the washing machine after Poppy had been away for a weekend in Ealing, but she had gone down to the galley to make herself a cup of tea to calm her fury. When she returned to the deck, Charley had vanished into the ocean mists. After calling for a long time, she had steered *Love's Young Dream* back to harbour. She could think of no explanation for the blood on the winch handle and her life jacket.

"At the time he vanished from the deck of *Love's Young Dream,* Inspector, was not Charley Twineham in serious trouble with the police?"

"Do you mean at the time of the murder, Mr. Rumpole?" The deep and melancholy voice of Mr. Injustice Graves seemed to come from the bottom of the seas, or from an area inhabited by the dead.

"No, my Lord. I do not mean 'after the murder.' The prosecution still has to prove that any murder took place. May I remind your Lordship that this is a case of notable absence of body."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The jury are no doubt aware," the old Gravestone intoned, "that there have been convictions for murder of a *corpus delicti.*"

"Oh, I'm sure, my Lord, that in the particular area of Bermondsey from which this jury are drawn, they talk of little but *'corpus delicti.'* What my Lord means," I translated for the benefit of twelve honest citizens, "is absence of body. Now, Inspector." I returned to the officer in charge of the case. "Wasn't Charley Twineham in trouble for taking orders by post for a huge number of nonexistent shoes, as well as trying to sell a number of empty houses he didn't own?"

"We were pursuing our enquiries, my Lord."

"Which might end up in charges of fraud, false pretences, and possibly forgery?"

"They might have, Mr. Rumpole, had Mr. Twineham still been alive," the inspector told me.

"Isn't that the point the jury have to decide?"

"I suppose it is," the officer conceded, and I gave a look of modest triumph at the jury, a pleasant moment interrupted by the rumble of the judge's graveyard voice.

"Assume that the deceased Twineham was thoroughly dishonest as you suggest, Mr. Rumpole. Does that justify anyone stunning him with a winch handle and pushing him into the sea?" My heart sank as the friendly faces of the Bermondsey twelve seemed to turn to stone at the judge's interruption.

Poppy's trial, which seemed to be heading remorselessly towards a verdict of "Guilty, my Lord," was interrupted by the great religious festival. The lights went on in Regent Street, the shops were crammed with the sort of presents you only buy as a final act of desperation, there were streamers in the Old Bailey canteen and limp holly decorated the screw's office down in the cells. The universal demand for Humpy Camels was such that, Claude told me in despair, he could find none available, even for ready money. Poppy was sent on a brief holiday to Holloway Prison until the second week in January.

It was there I visited her two days before Christmas, and did my best to cheer her up without offering false hopes. It was then she gave me some rather curious news.

"I heard from Mother," she said. "Little Charlotte—well, all right, we always call her Charlie—has been getting anonymous letters."

"What sort of letters?"

Poppy showed me one that her mother had sent on to her. The message was simple, even conventional—"Hope you get your heart's desire for Christmas." What was odd was that this document was constructed along the lines of poison pen letters, when the writer wants to hide his or her identity. The words had been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cut out of newspapers and gummed onto a sheet of bright red cardboard.

"Did you get the envelope?"

"I talked to Mummy on the telephone. She said she threw it away. It's not important, is it?"

"I'm not sure. It might be."

And then Poppy, a large blond woman who had once been pretty and was now watery-eyed and pale from prison, said, in a matter-of-fact sort of way, "He's won now, hasn't he? He's got me locked up for life."

"I'm not altogether sure. The case isn't over until the fat foreman of the jury comes back with a verdict. It all depends on one person."

"You or me?"

"Neither of us. At the moment I'm thinking of a rather shadowy private dick. A person with a crumpled mac and a hat that saw better days. His name's Fig Newton."

Ferdinand Isaac George Newton, always known in the trade as "Fig" Newton, ace private eye and sleuth extraordinaire, had a rotten Christmas. He spent it keeping watch on Poppy's mother's house in Ealing, not in seasonal snow but in relentless rain which saturated his macintosh and penetrated his hat. Standing on the edge of the dark garden at tea time, he was rewarded. He became conscious of another shadowy figure in the garden, a shortish man with a long upper lip and protruding teeth, who approached the French windows, walking delicately, and stood peering into a bright room. Under a glittering tree he saw his daughter Charlotte, also known as Charlie, open her presents. He was so engrossed in this spectacle and delighted with his daughter's joy as she discovered a whole family of Humpy Camels, complete with spare costumes, that he didn't hear Fig Newton mutter into his mobile. He was unpleasantly surprised when, on leaving the garden ten minutes later, he saw a car with a blue light coming rapidly towards him, containing one of Fig's friends from the local force. In no time at all he was assisting the police with their enquiries.

"Charley Twineham was up to his neck in trouble and about to be arrested for fraud. He wanted to disappear, but to do it in a way which would be a revenge on his wife, whom he had grown to hate as passionately as he loved his small daughter. He knew his doctor had a specimen of his blood, and must have cut his finger to bleed a little more on the winch handle and his wife's life jacket. On that misty morning it wasn't hard to swim ashore. He must have had his line of retreat well planned."

"But there was so much evidence against that wretched

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman." Hilda was still not sure, in spite of acquittal, that Poppy hadn't got away with murder. Later, finding we were short of cream for the reheat of the Christmas pudding, she said, "I know I ordered it. He never listens. Sometimes I could kill that milkman."

"Careful. Saying she could kill people was one of the strongest pieces of evidence against Poppy Twineham," I reminded her.

"Don't be silly, Rumpole. That woman obviously domineered over her unfortunate husband. You know I'm not like that, am I?"

I thought it was wiser not to answer. Instead I wondered how a man who could commit fraud and do his best to get his wife falsely convicted of murder still found it impossible not to watch his child open his presents at Christmas. ●

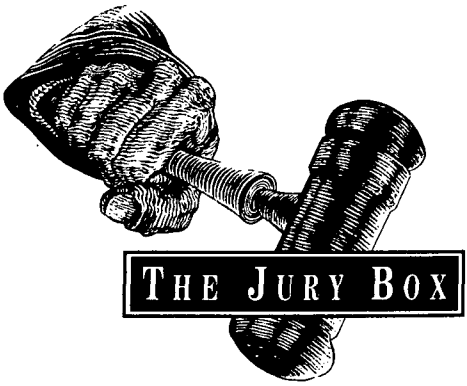
(continued from p. 5) candy-and-stationery store, a few coins clutched in my hand, hoping the new issue had arrived.

The next great impact was second only to the atomic impact of Sherlock Holmes—and, in one way, proved to be an even more shattering experience. In my fifteenth year I came across a mail-order advertisement for a set of books called The Three Owls Library. For a few dollars payable monthly I could purchase paradise on earth—for The Three Owls Library introduced me to Maurice Leblanc's Arsene Lupin, that hero of extraordinary verve, supreme cockiness, and flaming spirit. The sheer audacity of the man captured my imagination. I admired and envied him even more than I idolized Sherlock Holmes—Lupin, I knew, was everything I wasn't and couldn't be, everything I wanted and hoped to be. He was the "cool" man, whereas Holmes, by comparison, was the "cold" man, and Lupin's appeal to my emotions was, I confess, even stronger, more compelling, than Holmes's appeal to my intellect. Maurice Leblanc's plots—in books like *813* (his masterpiece)—had an enormous influence, technical and creative, on my own imaginativeness, and I acknowledge this debt after all these years.

And what were Manny and I doing with all this background of detective reading? Well, we were timidly putting our toes into the waters of creation, we were trying to plot a detective story! While walking together to and from high school, and while sitting together on streetcars in bad weather, still in Brooklyn, we had begun to experiment with ideas, to play with the strings of plot.

We didn't think in terms of a character—we weren't ready for that. Ellery was a long, long way off—budding authors in their mid teens are more preoccupied with action than with people. Carl Brandt, the famous literary agent, used to tell his clients: "Imagine a fishpond. A rock is thrown into the pond. Readers are not interested in what happens to the rock, they are interested in what happens to the fish." In that prelude to our careers, the seedtime of our lives,*(continued p. 99)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



by Jon L. Breen

Since this issue commemorates the seventieth anniversary of Ellery Queen's appearance on the mystery scene, every item in this column will have an Ellery Queen connection. Given the range of the Queen team's authorial and editorial activities, making the connections is no strain at all.

For example, what did the Queen team of Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee have in common with Ross Macdonald (Kenneth Millar), the subject of Tom Nolan's outstanding biography *Ross Macdonald: A Life* (Scribner, $32)? To put it simply, a determination to explore serious themes through the medium of detective fiction without ever deserting the kind of intricate puzzle-spinning and fair-play clueing that makes it a distinctive genre. Macdonald, husband of novelist Margaret Millar, was an unusual person: prodigiously intelligent, shy, athletic, generous, haunted by demons from the past. Nolan's account explores events of his subject's personal life never before related in much detail, especially the tragic teenage years and death at age 31 of the Millars' only daughter Linda, and Macdonald's gradual deterioration due to Alzheimer's disease. Ultimately, for all his quirkiness, the subject comes across as a thoroughly admirable human being as well as a serious and gifted writer.

**** Lynne Barrett: *The Secret Names of Women,* Carnegie Mellon University Press, distributed by Cornell University Press Services, P.O. Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14850; $15.95. One of editor Queen's priorities was to obliterate the arbitrary line between "literary" and "genre" fiction, and certainly that demarcation is less sharply drawn than it once was. Only one of the eight stories in this terrific collection, the Edgar-winning "Elvis Lives" (*EQMM,* September 1990), qualifies as crime fiction, but Barrett shows her attachment to the genre by no less than three Erle Stanley Gardner/Perry Mason

©1999 by Jon L. Breen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

references. Of the non-criminous tales, "Hush Money" is a great speculation about the source of one of Marilyn Monroe's key attributes, while "Meet the Impersonators" is a darkly funny and affecting 1986 story about a small-time rock band.

**** Doug Allyn: *All Creatures Dark and Dangerous,* Crippen & Landru, P.O. Box 9315, Norfolk, VA 23505; $40 signed limited; $16 trade paperback. Seven stories about Michigan veterinarian and amateur detective Dr. Westbrook, all from *EQMM* and two Readers Award winners, are gathered in this first collection by Edgar-winner Allyn. Though Westbrook has the traditional local police contact, his constantly surprising and agreeably told cases follow anything but conventional lines. Bibliographer Queen might have found a place for this book in that checklist of important volumes of short mystery fiction, *Queen's Quorum.*

*** Paula L. Woods: *Inner City Blues,* Norton, $23.95. In the July 1948 *EQMM,* editor Queen presented Hughes Allison's "Corollary," a landmark story in its realistic depiction of a Negro police detective. Editor Paula L. Woods included it in her great scholarly anthology of black mystery fiction *Spooks Spies, and Private Eyes* (Doubleday, 1995) and now has added her own police detective to the growing ranks of African-American sleuths. L.A. Homicide detective Charlotte Justice's first book-length case takes place during the 1992 Rodney King riots, allowing for a vivid depiction of a city and a police department in chaos as well as the subtle social levels of the black community. The only drawback, a small one in such an involving novel, is occasionally clumsy exposition through dialogue. (An even smaller complaint: Shouldn't someone in the editorial process have noted it should be "just deserts" on page 44 and not "just desserts"—or has a pun transmogrified into standard usage?)

*** Akimitsu Takagi: *The Informer,* translated from the Japanese by Sadako Mizuguchi, Soho, $22. In the seventies, editor Queen gave a boost to Japanese detective fiction in translation with the anthology *Ellery Queen's Japanese Golden Dozen.* Though not a contributor to that volume, Takagi (1920-1995) shared with author Queen an interest in specialized backgrounds (in this case, the financial world and industrial espionage) and intricate, surprising puzzle plots. This is (I believe) only the third Takagi novel to appear in English.

*** Robert J. Randisi and Christine Matthews: *Murder is the Deal of the Day,* St. Martin's, $22.95. The two cousins who were Ellery Queen formed the most famous collaborative byline in detective fiction history. Other notable ones included such husband-and-wife teams as Gwen Bristow and Bruce Manning, Kelley Roos, A.E. Maxwell, Frances and Richard Lockridge, and the Gordons. Now a mar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ried writing team introduces a promising new married sleuthing team, St. Louis book dealer Gil Hunt and TV shopping show emcee Claire Hunt, in an enjoyably low-key novel about the search for a serial killer of home shoppers.

** Della Borton: *Fade to Black,* Fawcett Gold Medal, $5.99. One of the Queens' favorite devices was the dying message, and this novel of a movie-crazed Ohio family recycles one of the most famous dying messages of them all. As 82-year-old matriarch and former movie star Mae Liberty dies, her last word is "Rosebud." There's some nice writing and detail of the business of running a movie theatre, but the huge cast is hard to keep track of and the solution is less than Queenian in its impact.

Historical mystery fiction, now holding a considerable market share, was virtually unheard of in the early decades of *EQMM* when editor Queen encouraged Lilian de la Torre (with Dr. Sam: Johnson), Breni James (with Socrates), and Theodore Mathieson (with several famous one-time sleuths) to pioneer the celebrity detective story. Now whole volumes are devoted to them, such as editor Mike Ashley's latest, *Royal Whodunnits* (Carroll & Graf, $11.95), with 25 original stories chronologically arranged from 1929 to 1949. In Stephen Baxter's "The Modern Cyrano," hitherto unknown passages from the diary of Queen Victoria show her a creditable amateur sleuth, while Richard A. Lupoff's "News from New Providence" puts a somewhat unsympathetic Duke of Windsor in the same role. The royalty depicted are not all British: Edward D. Hoch's typically fine "The Day the Dogs Died" concerns Napoleon, though not as detective, while Morgan Llewelyn's "Woman in a Wheelchair" (clever even if you anticipate the main secret) takes a fresh look at the mystery of Princess Anastasia.

A fine series from Oxford University Press is keeping the Ellery Queen-Dorothy L. Sayers-Hugh Greene tradition of scholarly anthologies alive. *Twelve Mystery Stories* and *Twelve Tales of Murder* ($9.95 each) emphasize 19th and 20th century tales respectively, most the work of British authors, with fascinating introductions and author notes by learned and entertaining editor Jack Adrian. Rosemary Herbert has edited *Twelve American Crime Stories* ($9.95), which does the same for American writers, all 20th century save Poe and ranging from early humorist Ellis Parker Butler to contemporaries Edward D. Hoch and Tony Hillerman. Also available is Hoch's earlier gathering of *Twelve American Detective Stories* ($9.95), a well-chosen selection ranging from Poe to Woolrich, including Futrelle, Queen, Rinehart and Chandler. (In Hoch's informative author notes, he says the most notable Queen novels were *Calamity Town* [1942] and *Cat of Many Tails* [1949].)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art by Allen Davis

The Bread of Affliction

by Michael A. Kahn

I know a former trial lawyer who gave it up to write courtroom thrillers. He claims he prefers the fictional kind because he gets to control the judge, the lawyers, the witnesses, and, best of all, the outcome. I think of him with envy whenever I have to deal with *In Re the Estate of Mendel Sofer*. It's definitely real, and I've long since lost control.

Back in the beginning, back when all I knew was that an eighty-two-year-old widower named Mendel Sofer had died of a heart attack, it had seemed a simple case. Indeed, those were the very words Phil Rosenberg used when he called.

"It's a simple case, Rachel," he assured me. "Even better, you'll be doing a *mitzvah*."

Phil and I had been classmates at Harvard and teammates on the Equitable Estoppels, a law-school coed softball team. Phil had

©1999 by Michael A. Kahn

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grown up in New York City and moved back there after graduation to join a midtown firm. I moved to Chicago, started as an associate at Abbott & Windsor, and eventually left that LaSalle Street sweatshop to go solo. Two years ago, shortly after my father died, I returned home to St. Louis and opened the Law Offices of Rachel Gold on the first floor of a renovated Victorian in the Central West End.

"A *mitzvah?*" I repeated. "Who was this guy, Phil?"

"A Holocaust survivor. Real tragedy. Lost his family in the concentration camps—mother, father, two brothers, a wife, two kids. All killed. Came to this country in nineteen forty-eight. Married again in fifty-six. She died of cancer eleven years ago. No children. He lived alone in an apartment downtown."

"Where do I fit in?"

"You'll represent Shalom Aliyah. It's an international organization that helps Jews emigrate to Israel. They've resettled thousands of black Jews from Ethiopia. They've helped Jews get out of Iran and Iraq and Red China and Bosnia. They also give financial assistance to hundreds of impoverished Jews in America who want to move to Israel. It's a great outfit. We're their general counsel."

"What's the connection with Mr. Sofer?"

"He left his entire estate to Shalom Aliyah—all but a hundred grand."

"How much are we talking about?"

"Seven figures. The guy was a cobbler. Literally. Shoe repair. Never made much, but whatever he had he put into stocks. One share here, one share there—it adds up. Guy died a millionaire."

Phil explained that after Mendel Sofer's death the public administrator conducted a search of his apartment and found a copy of the will in his desk. He contacted Shalom Aliyah, Shalom Aliyah contacted Phil's firm, and Phil contacted me. Tinker to Evers to Chance. I was Chance, and my role was to get the will admitted to probate and expedite the distribution of the assets.

"I don't do much probate work, Phil."

"No problem, Rachel. This one's a no-brainer."

And so it had seemed back when I sketched the outline of the petition. A simple but compelling story. The document itself was

Michael A. Kahn—a lawyer, a one-time features writer for *Chicago Magazine*, a father of five, and a resident of St. Louis—is the author of five suspense novels starring savvy St. Louis trial lawyer Rachel Gold, who has been described by *Bookends* as "a heroine for our time." *PW* has praised the Gold series for its intelligent, breezy dialogue and clever plotting—qualities of this new story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

extraordinary. Mr. Sofer's last will and testament dispensed with the usual legal gobbledygook for an impassioned style exemplified by the first sentence:

> I, Mendel Sofer, born into this world of grief and horror on the fifteenth day of Nisan, have tasted the Bread of Affliction.

In the Jewish calendar, the fifteenth day of Nisan is the first day of Passover, the festival of freedom celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from their oppression under Pharaoh. The Bread of Affliction is the unleavened bread known as *matzah* that the Jews eat throughout the holiday to remind us that our ancestors, in their hasty exodus from Egypt, hadn't had time to let their bread dough rise. The Passover allusions in Mr. Sofer's will added another layer of poignancy to the story of a man who had suffered the atrocities of a modern pharaoh named Adolf Hitler, who'd lost his loved ones in the ovens of Auschwitz as his ancestors had lost theirs in the misery of bondage. The link between the ancient and the modern seemed to transform his gift to Shalom Aliyah into a sacred bequest.

"Who's the other beneficiary, Phil?"

"A cleaning lady named Pearl Jefferson. Apparently, she cleaned his apartment for years."

That bequest seemed a wonderful final touch, and even more so after I met her. Pearl Jefferson was a heavyset black woman in her early forties who cleaned homes six days a week and lived in a tiny, dilapidated house in north St. Louis with her three adolescent sons and her husband Earl. Earl was on complete disability from a forklift accident; he spent his days in a wheelchair reading the Bible and doing needlepoint. Pearl almost fainted when I explained Mendel Sofer's bequest. $100,000 was more than five times her annual income. Afterwards, I strolled down her front walk feeling like a fairy godmother.

Unfortunately, I'd forgotten what happens to gifts from fairy godmothers when the clock strikes midnight.

The chimes began sounding the following week when Mendel Sofer's bank opened his safe-deposit box. Among his various personal papers were two sheets of bond paper. They were the original pages one and two of his will. Although they were stapled together, there was an additional pair of staple holes in the upper left corner of each page. Those additional holes confirmed what was already obvious: We had a significant problem. Mendel Sofer's will was six pages long. The last four pages of the original were missing. They weren't in his safe-deposit box and they weren't in his apartment, which the landlord had kept secured since the morning that Pearl Jefferson had found Mr. Sofer's corpse facedown on the bedroom floor. Three days after she discov-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ered his body, the public administrator performed an official search of the apartment and prepared a meticulous inventory of its contents, right down to the trash in the trash cans.

I did my own search the day after I learned of the missing pages. I found plenty of documents in the apartment—all duly noted on the public administrator's inventory—but no sign of pages three through six of his will.

Those missing pages were a potential disaster. Although I had a copy of the entire will in mint condition, there are certain rules of law that predate the era of high-speed photocopiers, one of which states that if the testator had custody of his will before his death and it cannot be found among his belongings after his death, he is presumed to have destroyed the will with the intent to revoke it. If that rule governed here, Mr. Sofer would be deemed to have died without a will, which would void his bequests to my client and to Pearl Jefferson. Instead, his estate would be distributed according to the ancient laws of descent—assuming that any blood heirs could be found. That was a big if, since all of the family on Mr. Sofer's side had perished in the concentration camps. As for his second wife, she had been the only child of two only children—now all deceased. Unfortunately, though, the lack of heirs would not resurrect the bequests in his will; instead, the money would escheat to the State of Missouri.

Nevertheless, the absence of heirs gave me some hope, since it also meant an absence of adversaries. Our judicial system operates on the adversary process. Just as inadmissible hearsay will be allowed if no one objects, my petition for admission of the will to probate might be allowed if no one opposed it. Accordingly, I was guardedly optimistic as the hearing date approached.

And that's when more midnight chimes sounded. Specifically, the Grubbs appeared. All twelve of them—residents of Montana and distant blood relatives of Mendel Sofer's second wife on her father's side. Her father had not been Jewish, and neither were the Grubbs. Even worse, two of them were members of the Aryan Jesus Regiment, a white-supremacist militia outfit headquartered in Montana. None of the Grubbs had ever heard of Mendel Sofer, or his second wife, or her parents. They learned of his estate the old-fashioned way: through an heir tracer. Heir tracers make their living by spotting lucrative estates with no known heirs. They go out and locate potential heirs and offer to help them pursue an undisclosed inheritance somewhere in America in exchange for a piece of the action. Here, if the judge upheld the presumption that Mr. Sofer revoked his will, the Grubbs would net approximately one million dollars after paying the tracer. Needless to say, they jumped at the deal, and the tracer quickly retained an attorney to challenge the will.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That attorney was Myron Dathan, and as far as I was concerned his appearance in the case was the final stroke of midnight. Dathan was one of the creepiest lawyers in St. Louis—cuddly as a tarantula, affable as a moray eel. Unfortunately, he was also one of the best lawyers in town—a brilliant litigator with an uncanny ability to detect his opponent's pressure points. Among Dathan's many unpleasant qualities was the way he exploited his religion for strategic advantage. He used his encyclopedic knowledge of Jewish law to cancel hearings, halt depositions, terminate meetings, and otherwise refuse to cooperate; when challenged, he would curtly cite an obscure Jewish holiday or custom that purportedly created the scheduling conflict. It was a technique that incapacitated gentiles. Although he generally wore a *yarmulke,* many fellow Jews questioned the depth of his convictions. He could, for example, be spotted at the trendier restaurants in town, usually in the company of one of his series of blond, leggy *shiksas* and generally dining on meals that were no more kosher than a Big Mac and milkshake. So, too, he often observed the Jewish sabbath aboard one of the riverboat casinos.

"Rachel," Dathan said, shaking his head in amusement, "the man tore up his will. You're in denial here. Face it: Your claim is *dreck."*

We were meeting in his sleek office—chrome-and-glass furniture, contemporary leather chairs, huge abstract paintings on the walls. Dathan gazed at me with an expression that hovered somewhere between pity and disdain—it was hard to tell which because his eyes were veiled behind the tinted lenses of his aviator glasses. The tint also made it hard to tell which part of my anatomy he was inspecting at the moment—although with Dathan you could safely narrow it to a few specific locations.

The way he lounged in his chair and languidly stroked his goatee made me feel as if I were in a carnivore's lair.

"Wrong, Myron," I told him. "Mr. Sofer simply made an innocent mistake. Don't forget that he grew up in an era of *carbon* copies. Carbon copies *look* like copies. Photocopies look like originals."

"Ah, but they feel like copies."

"Doesn't matter. He signed the photocopy in original ink. I'll argue that he thought he was signing the original of the will."

He chuckled. "You don't need me to tell you that one's a loser, Rachel. You already know it yourself."

He was right, but I'd never let on. "You're overconfident, Myron."

"No, I'm simply confident, and with excellent reason. But I'm also practical."

He leaned back in his chair and steepled his hands beneath his goateed chin. "The hearing is in two weeks. If we can settle this now, we can both save ourselves and our clients the time and expense of trial preparations. Let's talk some reality here, okay?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm listening."

"Under the will, your client will get about one point five million dollars. The rest goes to the *schvartza.*"

I stiffened. "Her name is Pearl Jefferson."

He waved his hand dismissively. "Whatever. The point is: When the will gets revoked, you both get *bupkes.*" He glanced at his watch. "Whoops, I'll make this short. We'll have to leave soon."

I checked my watch. 3:20 P.M. I gave him a puzzled look. "Why?"

"Come, come, Rachel. It's the thirteenth day of Nisan."

"So?"

He gave me a patronizing look. "Tonight is *bedikat chametz,* remember?"

It took a moment to connect the words with the fuzzy memory from childhood. "Oh, right."

Tomorrow was Passover eve. In traditional Jewish homes (as I confirmed later that night by checking the *Guide for the Jewish Homemaker* that my Aunt Becky gave me when I graduated law school), an important preparation for the holiday is to eliminate all *chametz* (leaven) from the home. The ceremony is known as the *bedikat chametz* (search for leaven) and takes place immediately after sunset on the night before Passover eve. The head of the house searches for *chametz* while carrying a wooden spoon, a feather, and a lighted candle. I remember, as a child, following my father around the kitchen and breakfast room. He let me carry the feather. When he found some *chametz*—bread crumbs, for example—we used the feather to sweep them into the spoon while reciting a special blessing. The crumbs, along with the feather and spoon, were burned the following morning. Frankly, I had trouble envisioning Myron Dathan playing *Hide the Chametz* with his current main squeeze, a giggly St. Louis Rams cheerleader with big hair and bigger boobs.

He stroked his goatee. "Here's our proposal: seventy-five grand to your client, seventy-five grand to the *schvart*—to the cleaning lady. I've already taken the liberty of conveying the offer to her. After all, she isn't represented by counsel." He paused and gave me a wink. "I was gratified by her reaction. She agrees that seventy-five thousand dollars is a lavish offer. She's quite eager to accept it. Unfortunately, I had to explain that the offer is contingent upon your client's acceptance. We either settle with both of you or we settle with neither of you." He glanced at his watch and stood up. "I have to leave. Perhaps you do, too."

When I returned to my office there were two urgent phone messages from Pearl Jefferson, the frantic and unwitting pawn in Myron Dathan's sadistic strategy. She was, as Dathan knew, his best settlement leverage over me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, Miss Gold, you just got to help my family," she begged when I returned her call. I listened with my eyes shut as she told me what that money would mean to her family: physical therapy for her husband, a home in a gang-free part of town with better schools for her sons, a cataract operation for her mother. She was sobbing at the end of the call, and my stomach was in knots. I told her I would talk it over with my client but that I couldn't promise anything.

"Oh, please, Miss Gold, you just got to help my family."

I talked it over with Phil, who talked it over with the client. They reached the same painful conclusion that I'd already reached: We couldn't give in. To accede to a settlement that would make the Grubbs—a clan with neo-Nazi ties—the principal beneficiaries of the estate of a Holocaust survivor was an irony too appalling to contemplate. If we were going down, we were going down fighting. We owed that much to the memory of Mendel Sofer.

Later that night I went on a long jog with Ozzie, my golden retriever. He trotted along at my side as I obsessed over the case, sifting through the facts for the hundredth time, struggling to come up with a more compelling legal theory than the one I tried on Myron Dathan. I came up empty. Every possible scenario crashed into the same obstacle, namely, the mystery of the missing pages. If there'd been no original pages, I could at least argue that Mr. Sofer mistook the photocopy for the original. I'd prevailed before on weaker grounds than that. But with two pages of the original will in his safe-deposit box, the "mistake" argument was futile.

I could come up with no rational explanation for why Mr. Sofer would have torn off the last four pages of his will but saved the first two. Although the pages he kept included his bequests to Shalom Aliyah and Pearl Jefferson, surely he knew that they were meaningless without the rest of the will—especially page six, which contained his notarized signature and the signatures of the two witnesses. Why discard that crucial page but save the first two?

As I passed the two-mile mark and turned back toward the house, I said, *"Lahma Anya."*

Ozzie looked at me, his head tilted curiously. I glanced down at him with a smile and shook my head. "Never mind, Oz."

Lahma Anya. That's what Mr. Sofer had scrawled on the back of page two of the will. I thought at first it might be someone's name—perhaps an important person in his life. I searched for such a connection in his other papers—especially the ones from the safe-deposit box—but found none. Same with the phone book. I wondered whether *Lahma Anya* was a Polish or Hebrew phrase; after all, he grew up in Poland and attended a yeshiva. But upon checking with a professor of Slavic languages at Washington University and an Israeli friend, I learned that the phrase was neither Polish nor Hebrew.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

❖ ❖ ❖

We gathered the following night at my sister Ann's house for the *Seder,* which is the traditional meal eaten on the first night of Passover. *Seder* means order, and the evening proceeds with a fixed order of events, the central purpose of which is to retell the story of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and their forty years in the desert. As God commands, "Tell your children on that day that this is what God did for me when I went out from Egypt."

The text for the *Seder* is the *Haggadah,* a book of readings and prayers that dates back thousands of years. Once upon a time, back when I was a child at the *Seders* conducted by my father, there'd been a magical quality to the evening, especially when my father reached the twelve plagues. I used to imagine the original Passover, more than three thousand years ago—that terrifying night when the angel of death stalked the Egyptian firstborn while the Hebrew slave families gathered in silence to eat the lamb that each had killed for the blood to smear on their doorposts as a sign to the angel to "pass over" their home.

But over the years the magic had faded. My expectations were especially low this year, mainly because I assumed that my brother-in-law, Richie the orthodontist, would conduct the *Seder.* Richie was a thoroughly assimilated Jew. He observed Yom Kippur with a round of golf at his country club, knew absolutely no Hebrew, and seemed to believe that the traditional dance at a Jewish wedding was the Electric Slide. Richie bragged that he conducted a Jiffy Lube *Seder*—"In and out in ten minutes or your money back."

But this year Richie's plans were foiled by the surprise arrival of his Uncle Al from New Jersey. While hardly a *Chasid,* Uncle Al was still a firm believer in what he called the "cover-to-cover bilingual *Seder,"* which meant that the evening would include both the original Hebrew and the English translations in the *Haggadah.* And thus it was Uncle Al, bald head gleaming as if he'd buffed it in honor of Passover, who solved the first mystery.

We had finished the opening blessing over the wine, the traditional washing of the hands, and the blessing over the greens—all according to the *Seder* sequence. As Richie glumly looked on, Uncle Al pulled the middle *matzah* out of the covered pile of three. Breaking the *matzah* in two, he studied the two pieces for a moment and then held up the smaller one.

Pausing to gaze around the table, he said, "Now we say the *Ha Lahma Anya."*

He looked down at the *Haggadah* and recited, *"Ha lahma anya di a-khalu a-vahata a b'ar'a d'Mitzrayim."*

In the background Uncle Al's voice droned on, but I was no longer listening. I was staring down at the Hebrew letters that spelled out the words *lahma anya.* I glanced at the English trans-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lation. *Bread of affliction?* I remembered enough Hebrew from my *bat mitzvah* to know that *lechem* meant bread.

"Wait," I said, looking up with a frown. "What language is this?"

Uncle Al stopped. "Pardon, Rachel?"

"Lahma anya," I said. "Is that Hebrew?"

He reread the text and looked up with a smile. "Very good, dear. It's actually Aramaic."

"It means 'bread of affliction'?" I asked.

"It certainly does."

And then he turned to the children with an impish grin, put down the smaller half of the broken *matzah,* and held up the other piece. "And who knows what this is?"

I sat back in wonder as two of the children shouted, "The *Afikoman!"*

It was as if Mendel Sofer himself had whispered the answer to me from his grave. The smaller piece of the broken *matzah* is the *Lahma Anya,* the Bread of Affliction. But as every Jewish child knows, the larger piece, known as the *Afikoman,* is the important half. It's the half that's worth money. The leader has to hide the *Afikoman* during the first half of the *Seder.* When dinner is over, the children are allowed to search for it. The one who finds it can hold it hostage until the leader pays a ransom.

Some commentators believe that the *Afikoman* is symbolic of the paschal lamb that was sacrificed at the time of the Temple in Jerusalem. Others believe that it evokes the forty years wandering in the desert in search of the Promised Land. And still others believe that its principal function is to keep the children alert during the long first half of the *Seder.* Whatever its traditional purpose, its very existence that night filled me with hope, an emotion I hadn't felt since the arrival of those awful Grubbs. Maybe Mendel Sofer hadn't destroyed those missing pages. Maybe they were his *Afikoman.*

I hate those brainteaser games, the ones that start with a weird scenario: *A man lives on the twelfth floor and rides the elevator to the lobby each morning, but when he comes home from work he rides only to the eighth floor unless someone else is on the elevator with him.* You're supposed to solve the mystery by asking astute yes-or-no questions.

Well, I'm terrible at it. I can never think of the right thing to ask and quickly lose patience. "Just tell me the answer," I finally grumble.

That's exactly how I felt: *A Holocaust survivor born on the first day of Passover prepares a new will a month after his second wife dies; he later labels the front part the Bread of Affliction, tears off the back pages and maybe, hopefully, hides it before he dies. Why, and where?* "Just tell me the answer," I grumbled, exasperated.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Unfortunately, Mendel Sofer wasn't telling, and neither were his personal papers. I'd searched through them again the morning after the *Seder*, looking for a clue. Nothing. I'd visited Pearl Jefferson to find out whether she knew anything about the missing pages. Mainly what I learned from Pearl—sandwiched between her pleas to settle with Dathan—was that the *Afikoman* routine was out of character for Mendel Sofer. He was not a lighthearted man, and he was certainly not the type who enjoyed practical jokes or puzzles. Pearl Jefferson claimed she never saw him smile during the years she cleaned his apartment. He was a bitter, suspicious man who even refused to apply for his Social Security pension because, as he told Pearl, the government would use it as a way to spy on him and steal his money if he went to the hospital.

He used to tell her that she was in his will, but she dismissed it as one of his ploys to keep her in line, because the only time he brought it up was when he was angry with her. "That man would rush over to his desk and root around in them drawers and pull out some papers and wave 'em at me, all the while yelling if I didn't do what he told me he gonna tear it up and leave me out in the cold." She sighed at the memory. "I never dreamed the man was telling the truth."

"Did you ever look at the document yourself?"

"No, ma'am. Didn't see any reason to 'cause I didn't believe him in the first place." She paused and shook her head. "He was a troublesome man to work for, especially after poor Mrs. Sofer passed, bless her soul."

"Why did you stay on?"

She studied me for a moment. "Because of that tattoo."

"What tattoo?"

"Those numbers. On his arm." She placed her hand upon her ample bosom.

"Every time I saw those numbers I recalled how much Mr. Sofer had already suffered, how much the Lord had already taken away from him, and I said to myself, if he wants me to stay on—well." She paused and shrugged. "How could I say no to that man?"

"Let her out, Myron."

I could hear him snicker on the other end of the line. "You're asking the wrong person, Rachel. Look in the mirror. You're the only one with the power to put real cash in her hands. Convince your client to accept the settlement and the cleaning lady gets her money. If not, not. By the way, the offer is about to change. After all, the trial is less than a week away. Beginning tomorrow, it drops ten grand per person per day. Sixty-five/sixty-five tomorrow. Fifty-five/fifty-five the day after."

"You're a jerk, Myron."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He chuckled. "Actually, I'm a fool. I shouldn't offer you a penny. It must be my weakness for pretty attorneys with sexy legs. Your claim isn't worth seventy-five grand, Rachel. Nowhere close. You have absolutely no leverage here. Your people may want to roll the dice, but make sure they understand they're gambling with the *schvartza*'s money, too."

Harriet Weinberger shook her head sadly. "I'm sorry, dear. I wish I could help. My Irving never told me anything about that."

We were in the lounge of Covenant House, an apartment complex for elderly adults located across the parking lot from the Jewish Community Center. Harriet Weinberger had moved there after her husband died a year ago at the age of eighty-seven. Harriet and Irving had been high-school sweethearts, she told me. That was a long time ago. She looked every bit her eighty-eight years—even though she'd dyed her thinning hair jet black. There was a slight palsy in her hands and head. It made her voice quiver.

Irving Weinberger had drafted Mendel Sofer's will eleven years ago. He'd also signed it as one of the witnesses. Unfortunately, Harriet knew nothing about Mendel Sofer, about his will, or about any missing pages. Indeed, she knew very little about her husband's career.

"Did he sell his law practice when he retired?" I asked.

She shook her head. "No. He just closed the door one day and came home and never returned."

"What about his clients?"

Harriet gazed at me with sad blue eyes, her head shaking slightly. "I don't think there were many clients toward the end. You see, my Irving had Alzheimer's disease." She paused and sighed. "He started forgetting things. It caused problems for some clients." Her eyes suddenly welled up with tears. "Poor thing."

I leaned forward and squeezed her hand. A wave of despair washed over me at the thought that Mr. Sofer might have hidden the back half of his will with his ailing attorney. If so, the prospect of finding the missing pages became even more remote.

"What about client files?" I asked, by now clutching at the proverbial straws. Maybe Weinberger had placed the missing pages in his Mendel Sofer file. I certainly had plenty of odds and ends in my client files.

Harriet shook her head helplessly. "I wouldn't know, dear."

"Would anyone?"

She mulled it over. "Perhaps Elsa."

"Elsa Kemper?"

She sat back with surprise. "Why, yes."

"She was your husband's secretary?"

"My goodness, you know Elsa?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Just her name." I showed her my copy of the last page of the will. "She signed as the other witness. I assumed that she was your husband's secretary."

I assumed correctly. Better yet, Elsa Kemper had been Irving Weinberger's secretary for almost forty years. And best of all, she was alive and—as that odd expression goes—still in full possession of her faculties. Her only concession to the aging process—she, too, was in her eighties—was a cane. We met in the sitting room of the immaculate bungalow in south St. Louis that she shared with her sister Mary.

Elsa nodded her head, remembering. "Oh, yes. Mr. Sofer. He was one of Mr. Weinberger's greenhorns." She paused and smiled at me. "That's what he called the newcomers. Greenhorns."

She explained that her boss had volunteered his legal services with the St. Louis Jewish Family and Children's Service after World War II. He was actively involved in the resettlement of Holocaust survivors, helping them navigate through landlord-tenant laws, employment policies, union rules, insurance regulations, and the like. Some of his greenhorns adapted quite well to their new country, eventually numbering among Weinberger's wealthiest clients. But for most, his services remained *pro bono.* Mendel Sofer fell somewhere in the middle: He insisted upon paying for the occasional legal service he required.

"Oh, but such a gloomy man," Elsa said, shaking her head. "And so distrustful. He was always nervous around me."

"Why?"

"My family came from Germany. It didn't matter that my parents moved here in nineteen twenty-four. He was convinced that anyone from Germany was a secret Nazi." She sighed. "Poor man."

"Do you recall that he changed his will after his second wife died?" I showed her my copy, pointing out where she had signed as a witness.

"Oh, yes, I typed it." She turned back to the first page and read the opening paragraph. "'Bread of Affliction.' I remember this one."

I explained the problem of the missing pages.

She shrugged. "I have no idea."

"Is it possible that he gave those pages to Mr. Weinberger to hide for him?"

She mulled it over. "I suppose anything's possible."

"Did your boss have a safe in his office?"

She nodded. "He did. A big black one. He kept it in the corner of his office. My heavens, it must have weighed five hundred pounds."

I felt a glimmer of hope. "What happened to it after he retired?"

"It was sold, along with all the office furniture." She smiled sadly and shook her head. "I took all the papers out and made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sure they were sent back to the clients."

My shoulders sagged. "And there was nothing of Mr. Sofer's in there?"

"Nothing, dear."

"What about a file?"

She gave me a puzzled look. "A file?"

"You said that Mr. Weinberger did some legal work for Mr. Sofer over the years. Did he keep a client file for him?"

She nodded. "Oh, yes. I maintained one on every client."

"Do you have any idea where they would be today?"

She leaned forward on her cane as she frowned in thought. I waited.

"The bar association," she finally said. "When we closed the practice, I arranged for delivery of all closed files to the bar association. They promised to put them in storage in case a former client needed his file. You might check with them."

I did.

It took the bar association three teeth-gnashing days to locate the storage warehouse where they'd sent Irving Weinberger's files, and then it took another full day for me to obtain permission to look through them. By then it was forty-eight hours before the trial and roughly forty-five minutes after Myron Dathan had called with his final offer: five thousand for my client, five thousand for Pearl Jefferson. With great effort I resisted the urge to tell Dathan just exactly where he could insert every one of those dollars, bill by bill. Instead, I declined his offer and gently hung up the phone. I wasn't about to let him get any perverse jollies from thinking that he'd finally gotten to me. Nor would I give him any new material for his creepy repertoire of woman-lawyer-with-PMS anecdotes.

I'd brought a change of clothes to work that morning, having already confirmed what the warehouse address seemed to suggest: Irving Weinberger's client files were stored under conditions somewhat less hygienic than a hospital operating room. I called my mother before changing into jeans and sneakers.

"They finally gave me permission."

"It's about time," she said, thoroughly annoyed with them. "You leaving now?"

"Five minutes."

"I'll meet you there."

"You're sure you want to do this, Mom?"

"Absolutely, sweetie."

And sure enough, there she was, standing on the sidewalk in front of the seedy warehouse. I waved at her as I pulled into a parking space. I had to smile. Sarah Gold to the rescue. My mother is the most determined, resourceful, and exasperating

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman I know. Life trained her well. She came to America from Lithuania at the age of three, having escaped with her mother and baby sister after the Nazis killed her father and the rest of his family. Fate remained cruel. My mother—a woman who reveres books and learning—was forced to drop out of high school and go to work when her mother (after whom I'm named) was diagnosed with terminal cancer. My grandmother, Rachel, died six months later, leaving her two daughters, Sarah and Becky, orphans at the ages of seventeen and fifteen. Two years later, at the age of nineteen, my mother married a gentle, shy bookkeeper ten years her senior named Seymour Gold. My sweet father was totally smitten by his beautiful, spirited wife and remained so until his death from a heart attack two years ago on the morning after Thanksgiving. Given her own link to the Holocaust, my mother had followed *In Re Sofer* with great interest.

Her outfit today was a Sarah Gold classic: thick hiking boots, a faded pair of black Guess jeans, a blue chambray workshirt, and, of all things, an aluminum hard hat.

"Where in the world did you get that hat?"

"Your father had it in the basement. What for, I don't know." She gestured toward the warehouse. "I should have brought one for you, too."

I was smiling. "You look like one of the Village People."

"Who?"

"Never mind." I gave her a kiss. "You look great, Mom."

And she did. My mother worked out regularly these days, including a weightlifting class that met twice a week at the JCC. With her high cheekbones, trim figure, and curly red hair (colored these days to cover the gray), Sarah Gold was still a striking woman at the age of fifty-six. I called her my Red Hot Mama.

Once inside the building, we followed a warehouse employee up the stairs to the second floor. It was a cavernous area lined with row after row of floor-to-ceiling metal shelves on which were stacked hundreds—maybe thousands—of cardboard boxes.

Motes of dust revolved slowly in the beams of light coming through cracks in the translucent windows. The worker led us down one of the aisles and stopped midway. He checked his sheet, squinted up at the boxes, and nodded. "That's them."

Irving Weinberger's client files were stored in thirty-two moldy boxes stacked in two columns. The worker pointed to a rolling ladder at the end of the aisle before he departed. My mother and I stood there in silence staring up at the boxes.

"Well," she finally said, "let's get busy."

It took us two hours and twenty-two boxes to find the manila file folder labeled *Mendel Sofer*. I carried it down the ladder and took it over to the rickety wooden table at the end of the aisle. Inside the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

folder were about seventy-five pages of documents. There were letters to Mr. Sofer's landlords, to his employers, and to a local department store (over a disputed charge-account bill). There was correspondence with the German government regarding reparations. There were a few contracts, drafts of his prior wills (there had been two of them), and a copy of his final will. But no *Afikoman.*

Tired and disappointed, I sat down on the floor and rested my back against a stack of boxes. My mother was leaning over the table, her back to me, scrutinizing the file. My mind felt numb as I watched her page through the documents. I tried to imagine where else he could have hidden the missing pages. I tilted my head back and stared at the cobwebs wafting from the light fixtures overhead. Nothing.

"Interesting," my mother said.

I lowered my gaze as she turned to me, holding a one-page document in her hand.

"What?" I asked dully.

"It's a memo he dictated after his first meeting with Mendel Sofer. Back on March eighth, nineteen forty-eight."

"And?"

My mother pursed her lips as she reread a portion of the memo. "I thought he was at Auschwitz."

I frowned. "He wasn't?"

She shook her head. "Mauthausen."

"What was that?"

She explained that Mauthausen was a concentration camp where the prisoners worked in rock quarries. Mr. Sofer was the only member of his family sent there. The Nazis shipped the rest of his family off to Auschwitz. After two years in Mauthausen, he somehow escaped. He hid in the forests of eastern Europe until he was discovered, starving and nearly delirious from fever, by a courageous Catholic priest named Herman Groszek. Father Groszek hid Sofer in the church attic until the war ended and then arranged for him to come to America. Groszek had a sister in St. Louis named Maria. She and her husband Edgar agreed to be Mendel Sofer's sponsors."

"What are sponsors?"

My mother explained that the U.S. government required that each Jewish immigrant have a sponsor in the city where he was to reside. The sponsor guaranteed that the new American wouldn't be a financial burden on the government. The Jewish philanthropic organizations found wealthy families to serve as nominal sponsors for the many Holocaust survivors who knew no one in America. Most of those immigrants rarely met their sponsors; instead, the local Jewish agency arranged for their housing and employment. In fact, as my mother explained, she and my grand-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mother had never met their sponsor.

But Mendel Sofer had real sponsors: Maria and Edgar Juskievicz. Although the Jewish Family and Children's Service helped secure him an apartment and a job, Mr. Sofer not only met the Juskieviczes but became close with them.

When my mother finished reading Weinberger's memo aloud, we gazed at each other.

Finally, my mother shrugged. "You have any better idea?"

I shook my head.

Nothing was easy about this case.

There was no telephone listing for Edgar or Maria Juskievicz. It took several tedious hours searching through old newspapers on microfilm to discover why. Edgar had died in 1964, Maria in 1972. According to her obituary, she was survived by a daughter, Hannah, and a son, Edgar, Jr. There was no St. Louis listing for a Juskievicz named Hannah or Edgar, Jr. The library had telephone directories for about thirty other cities around the country. None had a listing for either Hannah or Edgar, Jr.

By the time the library closed that evening at nine, I was completely out of leads. Even worse, it was now T-minus thirty-six hours to trial. I sat alone in my car in the library parking lot staring into the darkness, struggling with my frustration as I tried to concoct a rational plan of attack for the litigation. But no matter which strategy I considered, I kept returning to Hannah and Edgar, Jr. Finally, I got out of the car with my address book, walked over to the pay phone in front of the library, dropped in a quarter, and dialed the number. He answered on the third ring.

"I need you to find someone, Charlie."

"Jesus, Rachel, it's ten o'clock. Can't this wait till tomorrow?"

"No."

A pause. A weary sigh. "Jesus, Rachel."

I smiled. Charlie Ross was an ex-FBI special agent and one of the best private investigators I'd ever worked with. Last year I'd represented his son in a messy paternity lawsuit. Charlie owed me one. It was time to collect.

"Okay," he said. "Tell me what you know so far."

At 5:45 P.M. the following afternoon I crossed my fingers, said a silent prayer, and rang the doorbell to number 83 Chaucer Lane. It was, according to Charlie, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Randall O'Connor—a modest, ranch-style house in Canterbury Trails, a cookie-cutter subdivision in the far south suburbs. I could hear a dog barking out back and the laugh-track of a TV sitcom inside.

The door was opened by a twenty-something woman in white shorts and an untucked pink blouse. She was barefoot and had a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

diapered toddler perched on her hip. Her straight blond hair was pulled back in a ponytail. Several strands had come loose, and she brushed them away from her face with her free hand.

She registered my lawyer's garb and briefcase in a quick glance. "Yes?"

"Mrs. O'Connor?"

"That's me."

"I'm Rachel Gold."

"Oh, right. Come on in, Miss Gold."

"Call me Rachel," I said as I followed her into the house. "Please."

She turned. "Okay." She smiled. "Call me Miriam."

The following morning we gathered in the courtroom of the Honorable Jeremiah Donohue, Probate Division, Circuit Court of the City of St. Louis. I was alone at plaintiff's table. Over at the other table sat Myron Dathan and what I presumed to be two members of the Grubbs clan—a man and woman who could have passed for a stout version of the grim farm couple from *American Gothic,* except that he was wearing a leisure suit and a bolo tie. Behind me in the first row of the gallery sat Pearl Jefferson and two of her teenage sons—all dressed in their Sunday best.

Judge Donohue, looking even more florid than usual, entered the courtroom at ten minutes after nine and gaveled things to order. "Your Honor," I said, moving toward the podium, "we've encountered an unexpected problem this morning that may require a short continuance."

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Myron Dathan rise angrily to his feet.

"One of my witnesses," I continued, "is Rabbi Robert Abrams. He called me from the hospital an hour ago. Two of his congregants were involved in a serious automobile accident last night and both are in critical condition. Rabbi Abrams has been at the hospital with the victims' families since five this morning. I have the telephone number of the nurse's station on the floor where he is. Your Honor's clerk could call to find out whether he'll be able to come to court today."

"Judge," Dathan snapped with irritation, "I object to any delay. Of what possible relevance is the testimony of a reform rabbi in a will contest?" He turned to me with disdain. "Was Rabbi Abrams the decedent's rabbi?"

"No, Mr. Dathan." I turned to the judge. "Rabbi Abrams will testify as an expert witness. As Mr. Dathan knows, the decedent's will contains references to the Passover holiday. I intend to have Rabbi Abrams explain certain matters of Jewish law and custom relevant to those references."

Dathan snorted in amusement. "In that case, there's no reason

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to disturb him. I am quite certain that I can elucidate any Passover references that Ms. Gold deems relevant. Let the rabbi tend to his flock."

The judge studied Dathan for a moment and turned to me. "Counselor?"

I shrugged nonchalantly, trying to hide my pleasure. I'd initially panicked when Rabbi Abrams called—*Another thing gone wrong,* I'd groaned—but all things considered, I'd rather have the Passover testimony come from Dathan's lips.

"I'll accept counsel's offer," I said, "so long as I reserve the right to put Rabbi Abrams on the stand to explain any points of Jewish law or custom on which Mr. Dathan proves to be ignorant."

Judge Donohue nodded. "That seems fair enough. Call your first witness, Ms. Gold."

"We call Myron Dathan."

The judge gestured toward the witness box. "Mr. Dathan, watch your step."

I waited until he was sworn, seated, and ready.

"Mr. Dathan, the opening sentence of Mr. Sofer's will refers to the fifteenth day of Nisan. Can you explain that reference to the Court?"

"Certainly."

Dathan quickly warmed to the task. He gave a concise and, frankly, fascinating exegesis of the Jewish calendar, and from there we moved to the first reference to the Bread of Affliction, which Dathan explained with an interesting blend of Biblical fact and Talmudic rumination. By the time we reached the Aramaic version of Bread of Affliction, Dathan was into his pompous mode full-throttle. He gave the historical explanation for certain Jewish blessings being in Aramaic and then—in what he no doubt believed was an impressive display of Jewish erudition—recited the entire *Ha Lahma Anya* from memory. I glanced over at his slack-jawed clients, who were watching their attorney as if he were speaking in tongues.

I nodded as he spoke, delighted to have such an eloquent presentation of this crucial point in my case and even more delighted by Dathan's demeanor, which seemed to suggest that he hadn't even considered whether Mr. Sofer's Aramaic scrawl was anything more than an idle doodle.

"And what about the other half of the *matzah?*" I asked.

"You refer, of course, to the *Afikoman.*"

"The what?" Judge Donohue asked, looking up from his notes.

Dathan turned toward the judge and smiled patiently. "The *Afikoman,* Your Honor. Unlike the *Lahma Anya,* which has profound roots in the actual moment of the exodus from Egypt, most scholars believe that *Afikoman* comes from the Greek word *epikomoi,* which is generally thought to mean 'dessert.' Indeed, it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is stipulated that the consumption of the *Afikoman* is the final act of eating at the *Seder.*"

Keeping my tone casual, I said, "Tell the Court what happens to the *Afikoman* after it's separated from the Bread of Affliction."

"Certainly." Dathan turned toward the judge, who was taking careful notes. "After the leader recites the *Ha Lahma Anya,* Your Honor, he places that portion of the *matzah* back on his plate. Then he waits until he is confident that no one is watching him, at which point—"

His voice trailed off.

The judge looked up, his pen poised over his notes. "Yes? And then?"

Dathan was glaring at me, his eyes narrow slits.

I gave him a sweet smile. "Please continue, Mr. Dathan."

Dathan was silent.

"Mr. Dathan," the judge said, "what does the leader do with that other half of the *matzah* when no one's watching?"

Dathan scratched his goatee as he considered potential escape routes. There were none. "He hides it."

"Hides it?" the judge asked.

"Hides it," I repeated, watching Dathan. "And the goal of the others is to try to find the missing piece and bring it back, correct?"

Dathan stared at me.

"Correct?" I repeated.

After a moment, Dathan said, "Yes."

"No further questions."

The judge looked up with a frown. "Let me make sure I have this right. You start with a whole piece of *matzah,* and then the leader breaks it in half. One part is the . . ." He paused to check his notes . . . "the *Lahma Anya,* and that stays right there where everyone can see it. But the other half gets hidden, right?"

I nodded. "Correct."

The judge turned to Dathan. "What happens when you find it, Mr. Dathan?"

Dathan slowly turned to him. In a barely audible tone he said, "You can claim the reward."

"Reward? Like money?"

Dathan nodded, his jaws clenched.

The judge nodded. "Fascinating. Just fascinating. Thank you, counselor. You may step down."

Dathan passed by me without acknowledgment or eye contact.

"Call your next witness, Ms. Gold."

"Miriam O'Connor."

Miriam came forward from the back of the courtroom and took the oath in the witness box. She was holding a Manila envelope in her left hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I moved her quickly through the preliminaries—name, address, marital status, etc.—and then asked her whether she knew Mendel Sofer.

"I did. I was named after his sister. She was killed in the concentration camps."

"Were you close with Mr. Sofer?"

She nodded. "My entire family was."

"Why, Miriam?"

"My mother's Uncle Herman was a priest in Poland during World War Two. After Mr. Sofer escaped from the concentration camps, Uncle Herman hid him in the church until the war ended." She told the story of how Mendel Sofer came to America with the priest's sister as his sponsor; of how Maria's daughter Hannah was named after Mendel Sofer's first wife; of how Hannah had stayed close with Mr. Sofer after she became an adult. Miriam was Hannah's daughter, and she too grew to love the lonely man that everyone in her family called Uncle Mendel. Miriam's mother and father died in an automobile crash eight years ago. Mendel Sofer, who detested rabbis and organized religion, nevertheless went to the synagogue every morning for the next eleven months to recite the mourner's *Kaddish* for Miriam's parents.

"Did you stay close after that?" I asked softly.

She nodded, daubing her eyes with a handkerchief. "He sent us Christmas gifts each year. We had him over to the house for dinner each year on his birthday. I called him once a week to make sure he was okay." She shook her head, her lips quivering. "He was such an unhappy man. And so alone. He didn't trust the government. He didn't trust his bank. He didn't trust the police. I guess because they'd all betrayed him in Poland. He didn't trust anyone but our family. He called us his blessed trust."

She paused to blow her nose. Her eyes were red. I waited until she regained her self-control.

"Did Mr. Sofer entrust you with anything special?"

She nodded. "Three years ago he came to visit me on the first day of Passover." She smiled sheepishly. "I didn't know it was Passover until he told me." She brushed back her hair with her hand. "He gave me two Manila envelopes. This one," she said, holding it up, "and another."

"First tell me about the other one."

"He said it was mine but that I shouldn't open it until after he was dead."

"And when he died?"

She nodded, her eyes welling up again.

"What was inside, Miriam?"

"Stock certificates. From different companies. All with assignment forms transferring them from him to me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How much are the stocks worth?"

"Almost two hundred thousand dollars." I heard a gasp from one of the Grubbs.

"That was his gift to you, Miriam?" I asked.

She nodded, wiping her eyes again with the handkerchief. I waited. After a moment she looked up and took a deep breath.

"Tell us about the other envelope, Miriam," I asked gently. "The one you brought today."

"Uncle Mend—, um, Mr. Sofer told me that it held a secret and that I should never open the envelope. He told me that people might come looking for it after he died but that I could only give it to a certain person."

"Who?"

"He didn't know who the person would be. He said that he'd written a special password in Hebrew on the document. He also wrote it in English on the outside of the envelope so that I'd know what it was. He told me that I could only give the envelope to the person who knew the password. He made me promise."

"What happened after he died?"

"Nothing until yesterday, when you came to see me. You asked me whether Mr. Sofer had hidden any papers with me."

"And what did you say?"

"I asked if you knew the password."

"Did I?"

"Yes."

"Please hand the envelope to the judge, Miriam."

She did. I watched as he turned it over and squinted at the word scrawled just below the flap. He looked up at me, raised his eyebrows, and nodded.

I glanced toward Myron Dathan. He was staring up at the ceiling tiles, his arms crossed over his chest.

I turned back to the witness. "Please tell us the password, Miriam."

"Afikoman."

It took a little over two months for the judgment to become final. Although Dathan filed the usual post-trial motions, he was literally going through the motions, and when the judge denied all of them he didn't even bother filing an appeal. The judgment became final on a Monday in early June, and two days later I arranged for the wire transfer of $1,534,000 to Shalom Aliyah's headquarters in Tel Aviv. Later that afternoon I had the joy of handing Pearl Jefferson a cashier's check for $100,000.

That was Wednesday. Sunday was Father's Day—the second one since my father had died. It was an overcast day, unseasonably cool. I picked up my mother and my sister and drove the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

three of us to the Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery in University City. When we reached my father's grave, we took turns bringing him up to date on all the family news and gossip, and then we each placed a small rock on his headstone. I placed mine right next to the one I'd put there last month. My mother stepped back to the foot of the grave and stared at the headstone. My sister and I waited at her side. Several minutes passed, and then my mother sighed and turned to me. "So where is he?"

I unfolded the diagram the cemetery worker had drawn for me and studied it. "That way," I said, pointing.

Mendel Sofer was also buried at Chesed Shel Emeth, next to his second wife, Ruth. His grave was as yet unmarked—just a narrow, rectangular mound of earth on which tendrils of new grass had sprouted. As Sunday approached, I'd tried to think of some way to honor Mendel Sofer's memory, to help give closure to my brief but intense sojourn in his life and death. I'd looked at a few Holocaust poems, at a beautiful essay by Elie Weisel, at excerpts from speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—but none felt quite right for Mendel Sofer. Then I'd remembered the language of his will, and suddenly it was obvious.

I took out my *Haggadah* and opened it to the *Ha Lahma Anya.* I'd practiced this morning to make sure I could read the Hebrew. Clearing my throat, I began:

"Ha lahma anya di a-khalu a-vahatana b'ar'a d'Mitzrayim. This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. *Kol dikhfin yei'tei v'yeikhul.* For all who are hungry, let them come eat with us. *Kol ditzrikh yei'tei v'yefsah.* For all who are alone, let them come celebrate Passover with us. *Ha-shata hakha.* Now we are here. *Lashanah ha-ba'ah b'ar'a d'Yisrael.* Next year we shall be in the land of Israel. *Ha-shata av'dei.* Now we are enslaved. *Lashana ha-ba'ah b'nei horin.* Next year we shall be free."

Slowly, I closed the book. We stood together in silence at the foot of Mendel Sofer's grave.

"Amen," my mother finally said.

My sister nodded her head. "Amen."

I wiped a tear from the corner of my eye. *"Shalom,"* I whispered to him. ●

ON MY MARK

by Stephen D. Rogers

If there's any downside to a con
It's the marks over which I must fawn
It's the bores with whom I must deal
It's the honest who jump at a steal
It's the fools who think that they know
Like this Belgian I've picked named Poirot.

© 1999 Poem by Stephen D. Rogers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

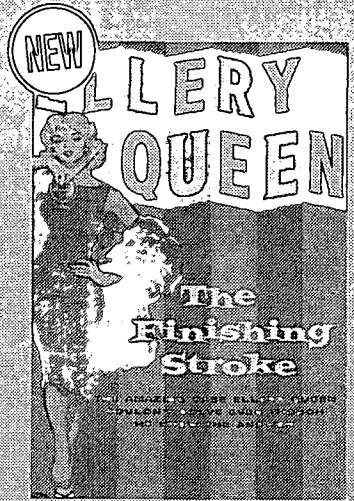
Celebrating 70 Years in Publication!

ELLERY QUEEN

available in

LARGE PRINT

As the Plot Thickens . . .
Uncover the Clues with Large Print!



New in Large Print

The Finishing Stroke
0-7838-8667-5 Paper $23.95

Also in Large Print

And on the Eighth Day . . .
0-7838-8428-1 Paper $21.95

The Dutch Shoe Mystery
0-7838-8429-X Paper $22.95

Ten Days' Wonder
0-7838-8430-3 Paper $22.95

To order above titles:
Phone 800/257-5157 – or – Fax 800/445-6991

For Product Information: Phone 800/223-1244

THORNDIKE PRESS
Publisher of Thorndike and G.K. Hall Large Print Books
P.O. Box 159 ◇ Thorndike, ME 04986

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE HANGED MAN

by Ian Rankin

Author of seven of Scotland's ten top-selling books, Edinburg native Ian Rankin usually writes about Scottish police inspector John Rebus. The Rebus books have brought the author worldwide recognition, and have won Britain's top crime-writing award, the Gold Dagger. Once in a while, though, the author likes to take a break and do a nonseries tale—we think you'll agree that the result, in this case, is splendid. †

The killer wandered through the fairground.

It was a travelling fair, and this was its first night in Kirkcaldy. It was a Thursday evening in April. The fair wouldn't get really busy until the weekend, by which time it would be missing one of its minor, if well-established, attractions.

He'd already made one reconaissance past the small white caravan with its chalkboard outside. Pinned to the board were a couple of faded letters from satisfied customers. A double-step led to the bead curtain. The door was tied open with baling twine. He didn't think there was anyone in there with her. If there was, she'd have closed the door. But all the same, he wanted to be careful. "Care" was his byword.

He called himself a killer. Which was to say that if anyone had asked him what he did for a living, he wouldn't have used any other term. He knew some in the profession thought "assassin" had a more glamorous ring to it. He'd looked it up in a dictionary, found it was to do with some old religious sect and derived from an Arabic word meaning "eater of hashish." He didn't believe in drugs himself; not so much as a half of lager before the job.

Some people preferred to call it a "hit," which made them "hit men." But he didn't *hit* people; he killed them stone dead. And there were other, more obscure euphemisms, but the bottom line was, he was a killer. And for today, the fair was his place of work, his hunting ground.

Not that it had taken a magic ball to find the subject. She'd be

©1999 by Ian Rankin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in that caravan right now, waiting for a punter. He'd give it ten more minutes, just so he could be sure she wasn't with someone—not a punter necessarily; maybe sharing a cuppa with a fellow traveller. Ten minutes: If no one came out or went in, he'd make himself her next and final customer.

Of course, if she was a real fortuneteller, she'd know he was coming and would have hightailed it out of town. But he thought she was here. He knew she was.

He pretended to watch three youths on the firing range. They made the elementary mistake of aiming along the barrel. The sights, of course, had been skewed; probably the barrel, too. And if they thought they were going to dislodge one of the moving targets by hitting it . . . well, best think again. Those targets would be weighted, reinforced. The odds were always on the side of the showman.

The fair stretched along the waterfront. There was a stiff breeze making some of the wooden structures creak. People pushed hair out of their eyes, or tucked chins into the collars of their jackets. The place wasn't busy, but it was busy enough. He didn't stand out, nothing memorable about him at all. His jeans, lumberjack shirt, and trainers were work clothes: At home he preferred a bit more style. But he was a long way from home today. His base was on the west coast, just down the Clyde from Glasgow. He didn't know anything about Fife at all. Kirkcaldy, what little he'd seen of it, wouldn't be lingering in his memory. He'd been to towns all over Scotland and the north of England. In his mind they formed a geography of violence. In Carlisle he'd used a knife, making it look like a drunken Saturday brawl. In Peterhead it had been a blow to the head and strangulation, with orders that the body shouldn't ever be found—a grand and a half to a fishing-boat captain had seen to that. In Airdrie, Arbroath, Ardrossan . . . he didn't always kill. Sometimes all that was needed was a brutal and public message. In those cases he became the postman, delivering the message to order.

He moved from the shooting range to another stall, where children tried to attach hoops to the prizes on a carousel. They were faring little better than their elders next door. No surprise, with most of the prizes oh-so-slightly exceeding the circumference of each hoop. When he checked his watch, he was surprised to find that the ten minutes had passed. A final look around, and he climbed the steps, tapped at the open door, and parted the bead curtain.

"Come in, love," she said. Gypsy Rosa, the sign outside called her. Palms read, your fortune foretold. Yet here she was, waiting for him.

"Close the door," she instructed. He saw that the twine holding

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it open was looped over a bent nail. He loosed it, and closed the door. The curtains were shut—which was ideal for his purpose—and, lacking any light from outside, the interior glowed from the half-dozen candles spaced around it. The surfaces had been draped with lengths of cheap black cloth. There was a black cloth over the table, too, with patterns of sun and moon embroidered into it. And there she sat, gesturing for him to squeeze his large frame into the banquette opposite. He nodded. He smiled. He looked at her.

She was middle-aged, her face lined and rouged. She'd been a looker in younger days, he could see that, but scarlet lipstick now made her mouth look too large and moist. She wore black muslin over her head, a gold band holding it in place. Her costume looked authentic enough: black lace, red silk, with astrological signs sewn into the arms. On the table sat a crystal ball, covered for now with a white handkerchief. The red fingernails of one hand tapped against a tarot deck. She asked him his name.

"Is that necessary?" he asked.

She shrugged. "It helps sometimes." They were like blind dates alone in a restaurant, the world outside ceasing to matter. Her eyes twinkled in the candlelight.

"My name's Mort," he told her.

She repeated the name, seeming amused by it.

"Short for Morton. My father was born there."

"It's also the French for death," she added.

"I didn't know," he lied.

She was smiling. "There's a lot you don't know, Mort. That's why you're here. A palm reading, is it?"

"What else do you offer?"

"The ball." She nodded towards it. "The cards."

He asked which she would recommend. In turn, she asked if this was his first visit to a psychic healer—that's what she called herself, "a psychic healer": "Because I heal souls," she added by way of explanation.

"I'm not sure I need healing," he argued.

"Oh, my dear, we all need some kind of healing. We're none of us *whole*. Look at you, for example."

He straightened in his chair, becoming aware for the first time that she was holding his right hand, palm upwards, her fingers stroking his knuckles. She looked down at the palm, frowned a little in concentration.

"You're a visitor, aren't you, dear?"

"Yes."

"Here on business, I'd say."

"Yes." He was studying the palm with her, as though trying to read its foreign words.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mmm." She began running the tip of one finger down the well-defined lines which crisscrossed his palm. "Not ticklish?" she chuckled. He allowed her the briefest of smiles. Looking at her face, he noticed it seemed softer than it had when he'd first entered the caravan. He revised her age downwards, felt slight pressure as she seemed to squeeze his hand, as if acknowledging the compliment.

"Doing all right for yourself, though," she informed him. "I mean, moneywise; no problems there. No, dear, your problems all stem from your particular line of work."

"My work?"

"You're not as relaxed about it as you used to be. Time was, you wouldn't have considered doing anything else. Easy money. But it doesn't feel like that anymore, does it?"

It felt warm in the caravan, stuffy, with no air getting in and all those candles burning. There was the metal weight pressed to his groin, the weight he'd always found so reassuring in times past. He told himself she was using cheap psychology. His accent wasn't local; he wore no wedding ring; his hands were clean and manicured. You could tell a lot about someone from such details.

"Shouldn't we agree on a price first?" he asked.

"Why should we do that, dear? I'm not a prostitute, am I?" He felt his ears reddening. "And besides, you can afford it, we both know you can. What's the point of letting money get in the way?" She was holding his hand in an ever tighter grip. She had strength, this one: He'd bear that in mind when the time came. He wouldn't play around, wouldn't string out her suffering. A quick squeeze of the trigger.

"I get the feeling," she said, "you're wondering why you're here. Would that be right?"

"I know exactly why I'm here."

"What? Here with me? Or here on this planet, living the life you've chosen?"

"Either . . . both." He spoke a little too quickly, could feel his pulse rate rising. He had to get it down again, had to be calm when the time came. Part of him said, *Do it now.* But another part said, *Hear her out.* He wriggled, trying to get comfortable.

"What I meant, though," she went on, "is you're not sure anymore why you do what you do. You've started to ask questions." She looked up at him. "The line of business you're in, I get the feeling you're just supposed to do what you're told. Is that right?" He nodded. "No talking back, no questions asked. You just do your work and wait for payday."

"I get paid upfront."

"Aren't you the lucky one?" She chuckled again. "But the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

money's not enough, is it? It can never recompense for not being happy or fulfilled."

"I could have got that from my girlfriend's *Cosmopolitan.*"

She smiled, then clapped her hands. "I'd like to try you with the cards. Are you game?"

"Is that what this is—a game?"

"You have your fun with words, dear. Euphemisms, that's all words are."

He tried not to gasp: It was as if she'd read his mind from earlier—all those euphemisms for "killer." She wasn't paying him any heed, was busy shuffling the outsized tarot deck. She asked him to touch the deck three times. Then she laid out the top three cards.

"Ah," she said, her fingers caressing the first one. "*Le soleil.* It means, the sun."

"I know what it means," he snapped.

She made a pout with her lips. "I thought you didn't know any French."

He was stuck for a moment. "There's a picture of the sun right there on the card," he said finally.

She nodded slowly. His breathing had quickened again.

"Second card," she said. "Death himself. *La mort.* Interesting that the French give it the feminine gender."

He looked at the picture of the skeleton. It was grinning, doing a little jig. On the ground beside it sat a lantern and an hourglass. The candle in the lantern had been snuffed out; the sand in the hourglass had all fallen through.

"Don't worry," she said, "it doesn't always portend a death."

"That's a relief," he said with a smile.

"The final card is intriguing—the hanged man. It can signify many things." She lifted it up so he could see it.

"And the three together?" he asked, curious now.

She held her hands as if in prayer. "I'm not sure," she said at last. "An unusual conjunction, to be sure."

"Death and the hanged man: a suicide maybe?"

She shrugged.

"Is the sex important? I mean, the fact that it is a man?"

She shook her head.

He licked his lips. "Maybe the ball would help," he suggested.

She looked at him, her eyes reflecting light from the candles. "You might be right." And she smiled. "Shall we?" As if they were but children, and the crystal ball little more than an illicit dare.

As she pulled the small glass globe towards them, he shifted again. The pistol barrel was chafing his thigh. He rubbed his jacket pocket, the one containing the silencer. He would have to hit her first, just to quiet her while he fitted the silencer to the gun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Slowly, she lifted the handkerchief from the ball, as if raising the curtain on some miniaturised stage show. She leaned forward, peering into the glass, giving him a view of creped cleavage. Her hands flitted over the ball, not quite touching it. Had he been a gerontophile, there would have been a hint of the erotic to the act.

"Don't you go thinking that!" she snapped. Then, seeing the startled look on his face, she winked. "The ball often makes things clearer."

"What was I thinking?" he blurted out.

"You want me to say it out loud?"

He shook his head, looked into the ball, saw her face reflected there, stretched and distorted. And floating somewhere within was his own face, too, surrounded by licking flames.

"What do you see?" he asked, needing to know now.

"I see a man who is asking why he is here. One person has the answer, but he has yet to ask this person. He is worried about the thing he must do—rightly worried, in my opinion."

She looked up at him again. Her eyes were the colour of polished oak. Tiny veins of blood seemed to pulse in the whites. He jerked back in his seat.

"You know, don't you?"

"Of course I know, Mort."

He nearly overturned the table as he got to his feet, pulling the gun from his waistband. "How?" he asked. "Who told you?"

She shook her head, not looking at the gun, apparently not interested in it. "It would happen one day. The moment you walked in, I felt it was you."

"You're not afraid." It was a statement rather than a question.

"Of course I'm afraid." But she didn't look it. "And a little sad, too."

He had the silencer out of his pocket, but was having trouble coordinating his hands. He'd practised a hundred times in the dark and had never had this trouble before. He'd had victims like her, though: the ones who accepted, who were maybe even a little grateful.

"You know who wants you dead?" he asked.

She nodded. "I think so. I may have gotten the odd fortune wrong, but I've made precious few enemies in my life."

"He's a rich man."

"Very rich," she conceded. "Not all of it honest money. And I'm sure he's well used to getting what he wants." She slid the ball away, brought out the cards again, and began shuffling them. "So ask me your question."

He was screwing the silencer onto the end of the barrel. The pistol was loaded, he only had to slide the safety off. He licked his lips again. So hot in here, so dry . . .

"Why?" he asked. "Why does he want a fortuneteller dead?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She got up, made to open the curtains.

"No," he commanded, pointing the gun at her, sliding off the safety. "Keep them closed."

"Afraid to shoot me in daylight?" When he didn't answer, she pulled open one curtain, then blew out the candles. He kept the pistol trained on her: a head shot, quick and always fatal. "I'll tell you," she said, sliding into her seat again. She motioned for him to sit. After a moment's hesitation, he did so, the pistol steady in his right hand. Wisps of smoke from the extinguished candles rose either side of her.

"We were young when we met," she began. "I was already working in a fairground—not this one. One night, he decided there had been enough of a courtship." She looked deep into his eyes, his own oak-coloured eyes. "Oh yes, he's used to getting what he wants. You know what I'm saying?" she went on quietly. "There was no question of consent. I tried to have the baby in secret, but it's hard to keep secrets from a man like him, a man with money, someone people fear. My baby was stolen from me. I began travelling then, and I've been travelling ever since. But always with my ear to the ground, always hearing things." Her eyes were liquid now. "You see, I knew a time would come when my baby would grow old enough to begin asking questions. And I knew the baby's father would not want the truth to come out." She reached out a shaking hand, reached past the gun to touch his cheek. "I just didn't think he'd be so cruel."

"Cruel?"

"So cruel as to send his own son—our son—to do his killing."

He shot to his feet again, banged his fists against the wall of the caravan. Rested his head there and screwed shut his eyes, the oak-coloured eyes—mirrors of her own—which had told her all she'd needed to know. He'd left the pistol on the table. She lifted it, surprised by its weight, and turned it in her hand.

"I'll kill him," he groaned. "I swear, I'll kill him for this."

With a smile, she slid the safety catch on, placed the gun back on the table. When he turned back to her, blinking away tears, she looked quite calm, almost serene, as if her faith in him had been rewarded at last. In her hand, she was holding a tarot card.

The hanged man.

"It will need to look like an accident," she said. "Either that or suicide."

Outside, the screams of frightened children: waltzers and big wheel and ghost train. One of his hands fell lightly on hers, the other reaching for his pistol.

"Mother," he said, with all the tenderness his parched soul could muster.●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art by Darryl Elliott

THE LAST OF THE ROSENTHALS

by Peter Turnbull

SATURDAY 18:00 HRS—24:00 HRS

The man stepped off the cream-coloured Rider York single-decker as it stopped at the railway station. He stood in front of the stone buildings of the station and then turned and looked at the ancient city walls and the blue, cloudless August sky above. Still just six P.M., a Saturday, and *was* he in the mood for a session. Was he ever! He knew, just knew, that he'd be having dim recollections of returning home later that evening. He crossed the Ouse by Londel Bridge and walked into the first pub he saw. Just to get one in while it was still quiet. The beer went down like silk so he had another, feeling at home in the low beams and wooden bar and sanded floorboards. The pub had been refur-

©1999 by Peter Turnbull

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bished to make it appear old and had, in the man's view, largely succeeded. The young barman in a crisp white shirt, black trousers, "Rupert" by his name badge, "Here to Serve You," approached the man as he drained his glass for the second time and said, "Another one, sir?"

"Not yet." The man shook his head. He left the pub and walked the narrow, winding streets to Friargate, where the stone buildings have life-size stone cats attached to the window sills, and walked into Friargate Police Station and up to the enquiry desk.

The stories on which Peter Turnbull has made his name as a crime writer nearly all feature the police of Glasgow's fictional P Division. But some years ago, Mr. Turnbull, who had for many years worked in Glasgow, returned to his native Yorkshire and began a new series involving a police department in the city of York, where, as you'll see, the mood and character of the people is very different from that of Glasgow.

"Yes, sir?" The fresh-faced young constable looked up at the ruddy-faced man who approached the desk.

"I've got a body to report." The man smiled, feeling pleased with himself, but he couldn't help noticing that the constable looked even younger than "Rupert—Here to Serve You."

The constable reached for the referral pad and picked up a ballpoint. "Yes, sir," he said. "A body, you say?"

"Aye."

"Been drinking, sir?"

"Two pints. Just now while it's quiet."

"Not in a hurry to report your find, are you?"

"No."

"I see. Can I have your name please, sir?"

The man gave his name as Michael Dondo and his age as fifty-six years. His occupation was farm labourer and his address, 6, Primrose Row, Leavening. "Tied cottages," he said. "Owned by Chevingtons. That's the way farming is now. When I was a lad, you worked for a farmer, now you work for a company, with their business managers dashing about in their fancy cars. And they've ripped up all the hedgerows. I had to do that. Some of them over a thousand years old. But I had to do it or get my cards."

"Yes, Mr. Dondo. The body, where is it?"

"Got a map?"

The map, when produced, revealed itself to be an Ordnance survey map, pinned to a large sheet of hardboard. It was lifted from behind the desk and laid onto the desk top. Dondo studied it and eventually stabbed it with a stubby finger, the nail of which, the constable noted, was bitten to the quick. "There," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The constable looked at the map, at where Dondo had stabbed it. "Just here, you say? . . . Where these two lanes . . ."

But Dondo had left the Victorian red-brick building. He had walked away silently, as the constable had noticed large men sometimes can. It was a Saturday night and Michael Dondo wanted a session on the beer.

Bill Hatch was pleased to see the trees. Saplings really, not yet trees, and that pleased him further. He had been enjoying a Saturday evening at home, just him and Sam the Labrador, Veronica having puttered away in her 2CV that morning with a "Bye, Dad," and he knew to expect her when he saw her. He had driven to Doncaster at the closing of the day's trading and purchased assorted unsaleable apples from the market traders in the open market, those that were bruised or half crushed. The traders, familiar with his routine, had put aside sacks of such apples to await his arrival. He bought, all told, four large sackfuls of such fruit and returned to Hambleton with them in the back of his Land Rover. He had turned into the driveway of his home and noticed, with a fatherly eye of concern, that Veronica had still not returned. He enjoyed the warmth of Sam's greeting, and the dog accompanied him as he stored three sacks of fruit in a dry shed. The other he took to the orchard. Standing at the orchard wall, he distributed the fruit liberally across the orchard by hand for Wilfred and Wilfreda, his two Gloucester Old Sport or "Orchard" pigs to find in their own time. They were, at the time, sheltering from the sun in their stye. He walked back into the house and washed and settled down to enjoy a quiet and pleasant night in, although he had not fully discounted the possibility that he and Sam might stroll down to The Feathers for a pint of brown and mild; at that time of the day, when the sun had set over the flat, green fields of this part of Yorkshire, and when the pubs were still emptier than they were full.

Then his phone rang.

Bill Hatch levered himself out of the reclining Parker Knoll and shuffled into the hallway, checkered shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows, baggy corduroy trousers, short, stocky, balding. He lifted the phone and said, "Hatch." Then he listened. Then he said, "I couldn't find that, too obscure. What's the nearest village? . . . Right. Can you have a car or motorcyclist wait for me in the middle of the village, somewhere in the square if it's got a square, or in the main street if it hasn't got a square? Tell him to look out for my car . . . Yes, same one . . . I mean, would I ever sell it? I'm going to have it stuffed when I die. I'll be there in about an hour. I'm afraid I can't be much sooner than that, but if the body is badly decomposed, a delay of sixty minutes at this stage won't make any difference."

Hatch drove into Selby, passing beneath the Abbey, and then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

took the road to York, driving through the city centre, the ancient buildings, the modern buildings, the open-topped double-decker buses full of gaping tourists, the slow-moving Ouse—a calm and peaceful stretch of water when he drove over it that evening but prone to rising angrily in the spring, damaging property and taking life. He left the city, as directed, on the Malton Road, turning right between flat green fields and woodland, the occasional cottage, the occasional *Country Life* type of property, large and prestigious. He came eventually to Leppington, turned left into the centre of the village. As he did so, a police motorcyclist, clearly awaiting his arrival, raised a hand in recognition, then executed a graceful, though in Hatch's understanding a totally illegal U-turn, and drove out of the village in the direction that Hatch was already travelling, beckoning Hatch to follow.

The motorcyclist escorted Hatch a short way beyond Leppington and then slowed. In front of the motorcyclist Hatch clearly made out police activity, two area cars, a black, windowless mortuary van, unmarked cars, blue and white police tape hanging limply in the still air of the early evening. Hatch halted his Land Rover behind the mortuary van and clambered out, taking his black bag with him. As he did so, Ken Menninot walked towards him. After the preliminaries Ken Menninot said, "It's in the copse."

"Corpse in the copse." Bill Hatch fell into step with Menninot as the two men walked towards a stand of trees.

"Fella came into Friargate this evening, gave his name and address, and told us where we'd find the body. When the duty officer looked up from the map, the fella had gone. . . . I know we don't like wasting words in this part of the world . . ."

"Just like that?" Hatch grinned.

"Just like that. We'll go and have a chat with him later, he may be able to offer more information—he's a son of the soil and works locally, going by the address he gave—but the important thing is that we found what he said we'd find and we found it where he said we'd find it. That's enough to be going on with." They approached the blue and white tape, a constable in a white shirt lifted it as they approached, and Menninot and Hatch ducked underneath it. "You know," Menninot continued, "the thing that gets me is that he clearly, calmly went on with his day's work, went home, washed, changed, went into York, had a beer or two, and only then did he wander into the nick and report his find. Calm or what?"

The two men stepped into the shade of the copse and then followed a path which ran beside a clump of tall nettles, beyond which a second constable, also in a white shirt, stood with a manner of noticeable reverence. The constable saluted Menninot and then stepped aside, allowing Menninot and Hatch access to a spread of black plastic sheeting which lay on the ground.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hatch knelt and lifted up the sheeting, releasing a storm of flies as he did so. He involuntarily flinched and then let the sheeting fall back. "Can't really get angry about the guy who reported it." Hatch stood. "She's been here awhile. A female . . ." He bent down and pulled the plastic sheeting completely from the body. "Laid out . . . see . . . arms by the side of the body, legs together, head upright. . . . Even suicides have some last-minute movement so that they're found curled up or on their side or reaching for a phone as if in the last moment of life they decide that life might be worth living after all. It makes me think that you're already looking at suspicious circumstances."

"Oh?"

"Well, she has been laid out, as I said. The only time that I have seen a corpse in such a position is when they've been murdered elsewhere and dumped at the place where found."

"I see."

"Look, I can't do anything here, she's too badly decomposed. You're looking at a period of time between death and the present measured in months. Not years, not weeks, but months. August now; without sticking my neck out then, I'd say she was brought here in the deep midwinter. January or February, I'd say."

"January or February," Menninot echoed.

"About then. All I can do now is ask that the body be conveyed to the York District Hospital for my attention. I'll do the post mortem tomorrow if you don't mind. I mean, where's the hurry? The most important twenty-four hours of a murder inquiry is the first twenty-four hours after the event and that, as we all agree, is long past. What will you do now?"

"Go through this copse with a fine-toothed comb, as procedure dictates. Yourself?"

"Supper at home, then a pint if I can get in before the Saturday night crush."

Hatch returned to Hambleton. Feeling bold, he experimented with spaghetti bolognese and surprised himself that he had prepared a passable meal. It was both tasty and filling, all that is required of "survival cooking." Later he took Sam in the direction of The Feathers, but upon approaching it he saw that he was too late for a quiet pint, the youth of Hambleton were already spilling out of the pub in noisy good humour, taking their lager into the evening with the sound of computer games filling the pub. Bill Hatch strolled past the pub rather than turn round and give the impression to the youth of the village that he disapproved of them. He walked on with Sam for a further fifteen minutes, a short, balding man and his best friend enjoying each other's company on a calm and balmy summer's evening. Later, at home, he rummaged about his kitchen and found a bottle of Black Sheep. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poured it into a tankard and enjoyed it whilst sitting on the back step with Sam beside him and the sounds of Wilfred and Wilfreda snorting and grunting with satisfaction as they foraged the orchard for the scattered apples. Still later, in bed, he felt unable to sleep until he heard the whirring of Veronica's 2CV approach the house, until he heard her footfall on the gravel, her key in the lock, and Sam's welcoming bark. It doesn't matter how old they are, you can never sleep if you're worrying about them. Someone had said that to Hatch when Veronica was still a babe in arms. How right, he thought, how right that person was. He heard the clock chime midnight. And he thought of the trees, the oak saplings, and how they promised so much for the future. They would, he thought, be there—fine, handsome trees—in three hundred years' time. He was pleased he had seen them.

SUNDAY

It was already hot by 09:30. Bill Hatch sat at the wooden table on the lawn of his house, pored over the *Sunday Times,* absorbing himself as usual in the Books section, with a tall, silver pot of percolated coffee beside him. Sam, avoiding the heat, had, after a brief exploration of the garden, retreated to the cool of the house. In the distance, across the fields, the remnants of a heat haze was being burnt off by the sun. When he felt awash with coffee and his mind nourished by intelligent journalism, he went into the house to prepare breakfast. Being a medical man, he was all too aware of the dangers of unhealthy eating, especially in middle age, but he had sprung, proudly so, from the section of the population which the British call the "working class" and Sunday just wasn't Sunday without a breakfast of bacon, eggs, black pudding, sausage, and fried bread. On that morning he had thankfully finished his breakfast and was pondering more caffeine when his phone rang.

"D.C. Sant here, sir."

"Sant?"

"Friargate."

"Aha, yes, the P.M. I said I'd do it today and I will, but it's too early to expect me . . ."

"Yes, sir. D. S. Menninot asked me to phone you this morning. He said I should allow you time for your breakfast . . . "

"Yes?" A note of puzzlement crept into Hatch's voice.

"Well, to cut a long story short, your attendance at the scene of the crime is requested. If not required."

"Not a second corpse?"

"I'm afraid so, sir. It was found yesterday evening. D.S. Menninot was reluctant to call you back, said that you had your mind set on a pint, left a note for the day shift to phone you."

"Good of him. But you could have called me back. That's what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm here for."

"I think D. S. Menninot felt that it wasn't such a time-pressing situation. The second corpse is as decomposed as the first, if not more so. "I'm sure an evidently recent corpse would have been a different matter."

"I'm sure it would be, too. Right, I'll be there as soon as."

Hatch scribbled a note for the still slumbering Veronica, whom he expected to rise at about one P.M. If not later. He secured the house with Sam inside. He drove to the copse beyond Leppington.

He parked his Land Rover behind a police vehicle and once again, black bag in hand, approached the blue and white police tape which delineated the scene of crime. He was approached by a youthful-looking C.I.D. officer.

"D.C. Sant?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you for coming so promptly."

"Couldn't place you at first. Know you by a different name?"

"De Larrabeitta, sir. Recently divorced and returned to my original surname. I turned convention on its head and took my wife's name rather than she taking mine. It's pleased my father that I've gone back to my original name; we can trace our line of Sants back to the Crusades. All I've got to do now is produce a son."

"Good for you. Getting divorced, I mean. It takes courage and faith in yourself. Take it from one who knows."

In the copse, Hatch once again allowed himself to glance at the saplings and then followed Sant to where the second body lay in a shallow grave. He knelt and brushed soil away from the bones. "Male," he said. "Fractured skull."

"Apparently D.S. Menninot made a thorough search of the copse yesterday, found nothing of note, but the dogs just wouldn't leave and started pawing at the ground. We're now satisfied that there are no more bodies in this location."

"Well, I'm gratified to hear it. Two corpses, two postmortems is sufficient for one Sunday. You'll be representing the police at the P.M.'s?"

"Yes, sir. I'm on duty. It falls to me to do so."

"Been to many P.M.'s?"

"Not so many, sir."

"Well, meet me at York District at two P.M., Department of Pathology, and you'll have two more P.M.'s to your credit. But as with his friend, there's little I can do here, save to take a soil and vegetation sample from the copse. I'll do that and then rendezvous with you at two P.M. And bring him," Hatch nodded at the corpse. "Bring him with you."

MONDAY

Leif Vossion sat upright in his chair. "Observations?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well." David Sant sat stiffly in front of Vossion and glanced over Vossion's shoulder through the small window at the York city-scape, with its blend of ancient and modern. Then he turned his attention back to Vossion, the blond-haired man whose hair was swept back and hung over his collar, long and lean of face with steely blue eyes, a man who from a distance looked much, much younger than his actual middle years, and close at hand had a face etched with the pain of personal tragedy. "I can only repeat what Bill Hatch has been able to tell us: male and female, young adult, twenty-five to forty-five years, he'll be doing a cross section of their teeth to determine their ages within a year of their actual age. Both died from a blow to the head, delivered from behind. The male, who was buried, was murdered when foliage was on the trees; he had rotting leaves in the soil that covered him."

"He was murdered in the summer?"

"Yes, sir. The woman was laid out on the ground as if she was murdered six months later, in the winter, when the soil was concrete-hard and requisite shallow grave could not be dug. It would seem that they, the two bodies, were connected in some way. Same method of murder, same location used to dump the bodies, both left neatly. The man buried, the woman laid out. Same murderer."

"Reasonable deduction."

"Back to the teeth, always a gold mine of information, the teeth, according to Bill Hatch." Sant began to relax, feeling he was in his stride. "Bill Hatch points out that the teeth had no decay, not the slightest, which is unheard of for people in the age range in which Bill Hatch places the bodies. Unless . . ."

"Unless?"

"They have spent the greater part of their lives in Eastern Europe and have lived off a spartan, sugar-free diet."

"Were not allowed to graze on chocolate as children."

"Not able to rather than not allowed."

"Fair point and a fair observation."

"It would go along with both bodies being naked when buried or left. As if the clothing, being East European, would aid identification. If Bill Hatch is correct in the first place—they could have both been naturally healthy and from the fair city of York. But no clothing and no jewellery or watches either. . . ."

"It's worth holding onto, the notion that they are outsiders. So what do you suggest we do?"

"Well, I understand that the fella who reported the body is being interviewed."

"Carmen Pharoah and Simon Markov are on it at the moment."

"Well, that being addressed, I'd be inclined to spring a lark, rise a deer, rattle a cage."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Meaning?"

"A press release, as big a splash as we can have, two bodies discovered, possibly overseas visitors . . . it might provoke a member of the public to come forward, it might provoke a panic in a felon, allowing attention to be drawn to him."

Vossion smiled. "Can you handle that? I don't think we need hide anything. Everything we know or deduce can be given to the media."

"I've got work to do." Dondo seemed aggressive, resentful. "I did what's right. What more do you want?" He addressed his remark to Markov, totally ignoring Carmen Pharoah. It was clear to both officers that Dondo did not care for women police officers and he definitely didn't like black female police officers. He had initially attempted to freeze Pharoah with a glare which she had been able to hold, comfortably so. Finding that he was unable to intimidate her, he settled for ignoring her and offered his undivided attention to Markov.

"This is more important," Pharoah said.

Dondo snorted but he didn't look at her.

"We can do this here or at the police station but we're going to do it," Markov said coldly. "In fact, I think I'd prefer to do it at the police station."

"So would I." Pharoah eyed Dondo steadily.

"All right, I'm on an hourly rate. I can't afford to leave the field. So what can I tell you?"

"Saturday?" said Pharoah, tall, lithe, slender.

"I was working. It's always busy this time of the year, coming up to the harvest. No rest for the likes of me in August and September."

"So what happened?"

"I was checking the field, walking round the edge checking for flattened wheat—kids, you know, and those loving couples. Fun for them, but expensive for the farmer. Anyway, I was walking past the wood, Coles Wood."

"Is that what it's called?" Pharoah pressed.

"Aye, though it's not a wood anymore. It got felled for timber about thirty years ago. And it got felled to make way for grain. I remember it being felled. I was a young fella then. Now it's just a third of an acre, if that. Not big enough to be called a wood." Dondo began to impress Pharoah as having the emotional maturity of a ten-year-old, the sort of grown man who'd take his bat and ball home if he didn't get his own way. "Anyway, I was passing the wood and heard a noise."

"Noise?"

"Flies. Thousands of them. So I went in; one or two flies you'd expect in a wood on a hot day, but so many . . . so I went in to see

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what they were feeding on. So I saw and then went on with my work."

"You didn't report it?"

"I did."

"My colleague meant sooner," Markov snarled. "Why didn't you report it sooner? As in, immediately?"

"I'm on an hourly rate, I told you. Besides which, the person had been a long time dead. I watch cop shows on TV. I know what I'm doing."

A bead of sweat ran off his brow.

"You think so?" Pharoah glanced beyond Dondo, at a plateau of wheat, then a scattering of red rooftops and beyond, a green hillside and above, a blue, cloudless sky.

"I reported it as soon as I could. I went into York, had a pot or two while the pubs were quiet, went to the cop shop and reported it, left the cop shop, and had some more pots. Then I went home but I don't remember going home."

"It's strange, is it not," said Pharoah, "that the body should have remained there for so long without being discovered?"

"Is that a question?" Dondo continued to look at Markov.

"It is if you've got an answer."

"It makes sense to me," Dondo said. "It's easily overlooked from two roads, it's not a dense stand of trees so it can be looked into, so it wouldn't be attractive to young couples that flatten the wheat. It's too small to walk a dog in, and the amount of flies would put anybody off."

"But not you?"

"The flies made me curious, but otherwise I wouldn't have gone into the wood, what's left of it. It's just that sort of place you'd walk past, not into."

"I see."

"It has nothing for the kids in the village, there's bigger woods for them with streams and rope swings on the trees. It's a parcel of land that no one is interested in. Any path in the wood is not man-made, that's a badger or a fox that's made that path. And all those nettles . . . so, aye, it's not the sort of place anyone would go in."

"You'd have to know Coles Wood was there, I think," Pharoah said.

"Is that a question?" This time Dondo turned and looked at Pharoah, as if mellowing. "Can't pin down your accent, love. Not Yorkshire, are you?"

"East London. So, would someone know it was there as an unattractive place and therefore a good place to dump a body? It would imply local knowledge?"

Dondo shrugged. "I wouldn't like to say, but I would think it's more likely to be local knowledge than luck."

Carmen Pharoah and Simon Markov thanked Dondo and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turned to walk back to their car. Dondo called after them and asked them how they had known where to find him.

"Your wife told us," said Pharoah and instantly regretted it.

"She did, did she," growled Dondo.

"One hundred and sixty bottles." The woman smiled at the bottles of sauces, preserves, and jellies on the large table. "And I wipe them clean each morning."

"Really?" Ken Menninot had sat, as invited, at the dining table. He and Mrs. Watham looked at each other across the metal tops of the bottles.

"Oh, yes. One hundred and sixty."

"I see."

"So that's why I missed the lunchtime news."

"Because of the bottles?"

"Because of cleaning the bottles; the bottles themselves didn't prevent me from doing anything."

"I stand corrected."

"So I caught the three o'clock bulletin and that's when I heard about the bodies in the wood and so I phoned you." The air in the guesthouse was heavy with the smell of lavender and wood polish. "And here you are."

"And here I am."

"Aye, well, it was the reference to the possibility of them being East Europeans that made my ears prick up. And six months separating their deaths. I believe they were in this guesthouse. I looked up the Visitors Book and here . . ." She handed Menninot a large blue gilt-edged book. "I've marked both pages."

Menninot turned to the marked pages and noted distinct Eastern European handwriting, the "9" with a curve at the bottom of the stem, for instance. Both entries had the name Rosenthal, both home addresses were given as East Berlin, Partisan Platz, 19. One Julius Rosenthal had booked in on the tenth of June the year previous, and the other, Victoria Rosenthal, had booked in on the sixth of January that year.

"This is quite a breakthrough." Menninot smiled at Mrs. Watham, a portly, smiling, silver-haired woman. A wedding band and a generous engagement rock spoke of a life before becoming the proprietor of a guesthouse.

"Is it?"

"Oh yes. It looks like they were husband and wife."

"They were brother and sister."

"They were?"

"They were. You see, in this line of business guests blend and merge in your mind, but very good ones or very bad ones or very interesting ones stick in your memory. And these two did. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came first, in the summer, very pleasant, very polite, and I wouldn't have remembered him if he hadn't left without paying his bill. But now I think there could be a reason for that."

"The best reason in the world."

"And I knew in my heart of hearts that he hadn't deliberately avoided paying his bill, because he left some possessions behind."

"Do you still have them?"

"In the cellar. Her possessions, too. You see, that's another reason why I remember them. She came to my door one winter's day just after Christmas—she was searching for her brother, she said. This house was his last address. When she found out her brother had left owing two nights' money, I showed her his entry in the Visitors Book. She insisted on paying his bill. Really nice young woman. Both in their late twenties, I'd say. She asked if she could rent the same room as her brother and, well, it was winter, hardly anybody in, so no problem. And I let her have her brother's things. She seemed upset when I gave them to her."

"What were they like in terms of personality?"

"He was confident, enthusiastic; she was quiet, full of concern and worry, but anxious to do the right thing, like paying off her brother's bill. Then she left without paying hers."

"They didn't say what had brought them to York?"

"No, they didn't. Well, he didn't. She came to look for him, at least I think that was what was happening. They were not tourists. They came to York for a purpose other than walking the walls."

"Is the room they occupied, occupied at present?"

"Well, it's let, but the guest is out photographing something or other."

"Could I, perhaps, see it?"

It was a small room with a view of the Minster in the middle distance. The present guest, Menninot noted, was not a tidy-minded person. Clothes were strewn everywhere.

"There is nothing here of them," Mrs. Watham said. "I know that this is more for you to say than me, but believe me, this room has been fully occupied since Easter and cleaned daily."

"I think you're right. After this length of time, there will be nothing here from a police point of view. Can I see the possessions they left?"

The possessions abandoned by the Rosenthals were, by Western standards, and to Menninot's eye, cheap and shoddy, plastic designed to look like leather. In one of the bags he found a notepad, and on the notepad was an address—Agrarian and Mercantile Credit Co., Monkgate, York. "I'll have to take these bags away with me."

"Please do. They're of little use to me and I think they're of little use to their owners now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Passports too," said Menninot, still rummaging. Julius and Victoria, just as they had signed the Visitors Book. Aged thirty-two and twenty-nine respectively.

"Fax to East Berlin Police via Interpol?" Vossion asked with raised eyebrows. "The story to date and request for any information."

"I would think so, sir. Meanwhile, I'll go and have a chat with Agrarian and Mercantile. See if they can shed light on the matter."

"Too late now, Ken." Vossion smiled. "Something that can wait until the morrow."

Ken Menninot drove home to Beverley and, as usual, found the ancient spire rising from the flat county like a stalagmite a very welcoming sight. He spent a calm and relaxed evening with his wife and two children. He didn't get many evenings like that. Few, in fact, too few.

Leif Vossion visited his wife and children in their shared plot in Fulford Cemetery. He knelt by the grave, pulling weeds from the gravel.

"Summer," he said. "Dear hearts, summer. I miss you each day, each of you each day, but somehow summers are the worst; perhaps it's the long evenings. . . . Nothing to report, really . . . I'm three days older than I was the last time I came. . . . We've been busy . . . an East German couple. . . . Well, brother and sister, really. . . . We've a little to go on but the crime, murder, was committed a long while ago. . . . But I'll let you know what happens."

That evening he stood alone at the bar in the saloon of the Fox and Hounds in Easingwold, where he had made his home following the accident. He found himself drinking a lot following the death of his wife and children, whose lives were so needlessly taken by two joy riders in a stolen car. While he had retained the will to live, it no longer seemed to matter that he was drinking himself into an early grave. It didn't seem to matter at all.

Simon Markov stood at the window of the living room of his home and looked out across the park as dusk settled. He heard a noise behind him but didn't turn. Carmen Pharoah came up and stood behind him and coiled her arms around him, pressing her cheek to his shoulder. "Hungry," she said softly in a pleading manner.

Markov smiled. "Indian, Chinese, Italian, Greek?"

"Mmmm . . . Indian."

TUESDAY

Rosenthal. The name leapt out of the walls at Ken Menninot. He sat as invited in the waiting room of the Agrarian and Mercantile Credit Company's early-Victorian building of red-brick exterior and dark-panelled interior. The room was adorned with portraits

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of chairmen past and each one was a Rosenthal. "Well, well, well," Ken Menninot said aloud and cared not one jot who, if anyone, heard him. Some moments later a young woman in a smart grey suit entered the waiting room and smiled at Menninot. "Mr. Robinson will see you now."

Menninot followed the young woman along a narrow, low-ceilinged corridor and said, "Rosenthal?"

"I'm sorry, sir?"

"I was looking at the portraits of the late chairmen, each one was a Rosenthal."

"Yes, sir. Family firm."

"Are you a Rosenthal?"

"No, sir, I'm employed by the family, as we all are who are outside the boardroom. That's the culture of the firm, sir. You're either in the boardroom or you're outside the boardroom."

"And if you're in the boardroom, you're in the family?"

"Yes, sir. Only Rosenthals are in the boardroom."

"Bit incestuous, isn't it?"

"If you'd care to follow me, sir?" She walked on in silence until she came to a door marked Peter Robinson. She tapped on the door and opened it. "This is the gentleman from the police, sir."

Robinson stood and extended a hand to Menninot as the young woman closed the door behind her. Menninot accepted Robinson's hand. It was a warm, firm grip.

"Please . . ." said Robinson, indicating a leather chair in front of his desk. "It's not often we get visits from the police." He resumed his seat.

"I can imagine." Menninot sat and read Robinson. Smart, alert, a classic young executive. But he also thought that Robinson seemed cautious, overconcentrating. The experienced police officer in Ken Menninot told him the gleam in Robinson's eye, the brilliant toothpaste-ad smile were hiding something. "We were wondering if you could help us?"

"Yes?"

"Yes, it's in relation to the double murder which you may have read about, or seen on the TV, the two bodies found in a small wood just outside York."

"Yes . . . I read of it."

"Well, we have identified them as brother and sister."

"Oh dear, a double tragedy for a family."

"Indeed. . . . Can I ask if you are related to the Rosenthals?"

"Yes I am, by marriage."

"I see. You see, I ask because we have established that the murder victims were East Berliners. One victim had a notebook in which the name and address of this company was written. It has just now come to my attention that the family of the owners of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this company is Rosenthal."

"Yes."

"Which is the surname of the two murder victims. They were Julius Rosenthal and his sister Victoria."

"Oh."

He was nervous. Very nervous. Ken Menninot enjoyed the spectacle of a bead of sweat running off the young executive's brow. "Can you shed any light on the connection?"

"I can't. I'm sorry."

"But you don't deny there is a connection? Same surname, the address of this company in the notebook of the deceased." Menninot read the room. Airy, everything in its place, plenty of light. A modern room in an old building. "It's a puzzle, all right, and the key is the Rosenthal family."

"Well, I can understand your curiosity about the Rosenthals, but I can't help you."

"Who is the present chairman?"

"Mr. Isaac."

"Mr. Isaac Rosenthal?"

"Yes. We refer to the family as Mr. Isaac or Mr. Israel. There was another brother, Mr. Samuel, but he is deceased. Mr. Isaac holds the chairmanship at present."

"And where would I find him?"

"Today, now?"

"Yes, now. Today."

"At home. Mr. Isaac delegates a lot, does little actual work. Both he and Mr. Israel are elderly."

"And home is?"

"The Manor House, Great Saxlingham. You must know where Full Sutton Goal is?"

"Of course."

"Drive as if going to the prison and then just drive past it, you'll come to Little Saxlingham and a quarter of a mile beyond is Great Saxlingham. We objected to the prison being built, but in fact you'd hardly know it's there."

"We . . . ?"

"The residents of Stamford Bridge and surrounding cottages."

"You being one?"

"I was too young to protest at the time."

"You grew up there?"

"Yes."

"You'd know the area well?"

"As well as anyone."

"You might know the wood where the bodies were found, Coles Wood?"

"Not by name."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Near Leppington."
"Oh, around there . . ."
"You know Leppington?"
"I know where it is."

Ken Menninot drove out to Great Saxlingham. He was not unfamiliar with the village: a main road which curved slightly in the middle; black and white half-timbered houses abutted each other unless separated by a narrow lane; a coaching inn with a covered driveway to the rear of the building; a post office; a baker's; a butcher's; a parish church with Norman steeple and blue clock face with gold-painted numerals and clock hands; an ancient graveyard with listing headstones like a gang of drunken men freeze-framed in time, and with the company of a shade-giving yew; a set of stocks beside the war memorial. A cream and red Rider York single-decker shimmered through a heat haze.

The Manor House stood beyond the village, four-square and solid; a gravel-covered drive ran between two tall stone gateposts and wide lawns that hissed under rotating hoses direct to the front door of the building. Menninot halted his car a respectable distance from the house and walked to the front door, allowing his feet to crunch the gravel. He rapped the brass knocker twice. It was opened by a middle-aged woman in a starched white blouse and a black dress. "Can I help you, sir?"

"All right, Emily. I'll attend to this." The voice came from the interior of the house before Menninot could reply.

"Very good, madam." Emily retreated into the gloom, to be replaced on the threshold by a woman in her twenties, thought Menninot.

"You'll be the police officer my husband told us to expect. Mr. . . . "

"Menninot. North Yorkshire Constabulary."

"Aha, yes . . . I'm old enough to recall the City of York Police Force."

"That's going back a little."

"A lot, really, but change always gives a pleasant illusion of progress."

Menninot smiled. He enjoyed her dry humour. She was a short woman, little more than five feet tall, short, dark hair, pleasant, balanced features, and would consider herself attractive. She was dressed for riding: khaki jodhpurs, polished black boots, black jacket, hat and whip in hand.

"I'm Mrs. Robinson. You called on my husband earlier today, a short while ago, in fact. He phoned through to say you'd be calling. You've rather set the cat among the pigeons. Mr. Isaac and Mr. Israel are in the library now, two old codgers trying to concoct some story to fob you off with. They're wondering how they're

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to lie their way out of murder. Double murder, in fact."

Menninot's jaw dropped.

Mrs. Robinson stepped from the threshold, down the steps, pulling the door shut behind her, and began to walk parallel to the front of the house. She turned and smiled and said, "Well, do you want to know the story or don't you?"

"Mrs. Robinson, I must caution you . . ."

"Caution me not, Mr. Menninot. What information I give I give of my own free will. I'm going riding. Come on, you can accompany me to the stables. We can talk there."

Menninot fell in step with Mrs. Robinson and they walked in silence to the rear of the Manor House where, Menninot saw, were stables and paddocks. As they approached the paddocks a gleaming black stallion whinnied in recognition of Mrs. Robinson and walked towards her. She then went to the paddock fence and stroked the nose of the stallion and patted its neck. "Meet Samson."

"I'm impressed."

"Do you know horses, Mr. Menninot?"

"No. . . . I can't say I do, but even to my untrained eye . . ."

"Yes, he is beautiful, isn't he? He's an American quarter horse. Very valuable. I'm quite the envy of all the stables in this area, aren't I, Samson? But . . ." she gave Samson a final pat on his neck, "let's go into the tack room, out of this heat." She led Menninot into a room in the stable block in which harnesses were stored, hanging neatly from hooks set high in the wall; shelves held bottles of saddle soap and leather polish. A saddle was laid on a trestle and Mrs. Robinson stepped up and sat astride it. "I'm only happy in one of these," she explained. "I confess if I could I'd have this arrangement in the living room and sit like this whilst watching television. Better on a horse, though."

"I imagine. You have information you want to give?"

"Oh yes, freely. You see, I want only to serve the ends of justice."

"Very public-spirited of you."

She smiled. "I didn't say I want to serve the ends of criminal justice. I make no bones about it, Mr. Menninot, there is a different agenda here, for me anyway. For me, this is family justice at stake. For me, it's natural justice. Your justice and my justice are different, but I think you'll find that in this case, if you serve one, you also serve the other."

"I see." Menninot leaned against a workbench. "I'm all ears."

"Mr. Israel and Mr. Isaac and my husband Marcus Robinson conspired to murder Julius and Victoria Rosenthal. I was witness to the murder of Victoria, at least the immediate aftermath."

"And you didn't come forward?"

"No, I didn't." She smiled. "Not at the time. I am doing so now."

Menninot searched for a word to describe Mrs. Robinson's hon-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

esty. "Disarming" he thought to be an understatement. "Why not?"

"I don't know . . . confusion, disbelief, refusal to believe what I'd seen, a state of denial as I think the psychologists call it. The realisation that I was turning in my own uncles and husband. . . . Fear for my safety unless I agreed to go along with it. . . . All of that all rolled into one."

Menninot could accept that. "Go on."

"You have to understand that this is a house divided. My father, Mr. Samuel, was the elder brother of Mr. Isaac and Mr. Israel and rightful heir and chairman. But by means of boardroom assassination and ambush and conspiracy, he was forced out of the company. He felt betrayed by his brothers, Mr. Isaac and Mr. Israel, and died an early death, a broken man. The death certificate said 'heart failure' but to my mind, to all intents and purposes, he was murdered by his younger brothers. Mr. Isaac and Mr. Israel can't get rid of me so easily because I inherited a lot of shares in the company, which I refuse to sell, and I'm also the only heir to the whole lot, Mr. Isaac and Mr. Israel never having married. And me an only child. My husband married me only for my money. He told me that once in a drunken rage . . . *in vino veritas.*"

"My Latin . . ."

"In wine there is truth. You speak your mind when you are drunk. My husband comes from a family who have suffered 'downward social mobility' as the phrase has it. His parents have turned to the Distressed Gentlefolk's Association for financial relief. They have the class, the style, the background, but no money and none in the offing, either, except what may come their way should their son marry into it. No wonder they were delighted at our marriage. I dare say we all fear the knock of poverty on our front door, but poverty knocks hardest on the door of those who have grown used to wealth and then have lost it."

"That's debatable," Menninot said coldly. Privately he thought the statement reprehensible and one which could only be the product of a smug, self-satisfied mind. But he wanted the cooperation of this woman and so he kept his opinion to himself.

"My husband has no feelings for me. I have none for him. My uncles need me to keep the company together upon their deaths, but I hold them responsible for my father's death. He was a lovely man."

"I'm sorry."

"Well, that was the state of play until about a year ago, yes, summer last year. Strained relationships, but everything in stalemate. Then Julius Rosenthal arrived totally out of the blue and upset the apple cart. He arrived at our front door one summer evening. He was overcome with joy at having found us, but the reaction he got was frosty. I met him once, briefly; he seemed confused by then and I never saw him again. It wasn't until much

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

later that I learned that he had been murdered." She paused. "This is difficult."

"Take your time. You're doing fine."

"Well . . . in the winter, this winter last, I received a phone call from a woman who spoke word-perfect English but with a strong German accent. She introduced herself as Victoria Rosenthal, my relative from Germany. She was Julius's sister, she said, and could she meet me?"

"So you did?"

"In a cafe in York. We had a long lunch together, a very long lunch. The story she told was that before the Second World War my grandfather, my father's father, Moses Rosenthal, received a visit from a relative, a blood relative, also a Rosenthal, who was a German Jew. This was when things were getting difficult for European Jewry and this man was unable to emigrate but he was able to visit, and he did so, bringing a fortune with him which he converted into British currency, into sterling. He asked my grandfather if he would look after the money for him until he or his heirs could recover it. My grandfather agreed and gave a receipt, agreeing to repay the money with interest upon demand. He took the money into the company accounts and gave his relative a receipt in the company name. This man returned to Germany with the receipt, and the story was that he buried it in a bottle with a sealed top which was inside a crush-proof container in woodland to the west of Berlin. The location was known by all the German Rosenthals of our line and passed on to their children. But so few Rosenthals survived the war, and even those who did were in the East. But eventually the wall came down, the Iron Curtain was raised, and Julius visited West Germany and located the wood and the marker in the wood—an ancient oak tree, I believe—and one night dug up his fortune. He saved sufficient money to travel to England, and wrote daily letters to his sister, telling her of his progress. The last letter she received from him told her how he was about to call on 'our English relatives with the receipt.'"

Menninot groaned. "Don't tell me, neither he nor the receipt were seen again."

"In a word, yes. But at the time I didn't know what had happened. A woman, you see, I was squeezed out of the business side of things. I knew nothing of the receipt until Victoria told me, though she was more concerned for Julius's safety than the money. But when she asked about the receipt, I suggested she direct her enquiries to my uncles. Naiveté is not the word. . . . If only I had known I was directing her to her death."

"So she called on the house, this house?"

"Yes. But on the occasion of her visit I was at home and I was drawn to the sound of a disturbance downstairs. I went down-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stairs and looked around and I eventually found my husband and my two uncles bundling the naked body of Victoria into the rear of the Range Rover and I heard my husband say, 'I'll put her with her brother. Nobody goes into that wood.'"

"You'll sign a statement to that effect?"

"I will. Anyway, they looked up and saw me and came clean. Apparently the amount of money we were obliged to pay Julius and Victoria was sufficient to ruin the company. Nearly one million pounds in today's value. My uncles were furious that their father had given a receipt in the company name. If he had given a personal receipt, they wouldn't have been obliged to honour it, but the company goes on from generation to generation. While we may wither and perish like leaves on a tree, nothing changes the company. And the receipt was enforceable. They saw only one way out, and my husband did the cold deed in both cases. How was it that their bodies were found?"

"A farm worker investigating the reason for a large number of flies in the copse."

"Well, my husband can spend many years kicking himself for that. He planned to bury Victoria's body in the spring when the ground was no longer frozen. If he had done that . . ."

"But he didn't. Why do you think Victoria phoned and asked to speak to you?"

"Woman to woman, I think. Julius would have told her the composition of the family, two very elderly men, a male relative by marriage, and me. If I was in her position, I would have done the same, especially since she was seeking her brother rather than her fortune. I suppose now you'll be wanting to question Mr. Isaac and Mr. Israel and my husband?"

"We will. But right now I want you to postpone your ride. I want to take a statement from you. We'll have to go to Friargate to do that."

"Very well." She slid from the saddle. "But when the time comes, I suggest that you talk to Mr. Isaac first. He's plagued with guilt, drinking heavily, and he has an internal growth. He's not long for the world, and he knows it. He won't want to die with all this on his conscience. Mr. Israel and my husband will be more stubborn, but with my statement, and with the pile of burnt East German clothing you'll find buried behind the stables, and with Mr. Isaac's confession, you should have all you need."

"And where does that leave you, Mrs. Robinson?"

"It leaves me the last of the Rosenthals, about to divorce my husband, who cannot, anyway, profit from a crime. So says the law of our land."

"Set to inherit it all?"

"Yes. But the ends of justice have been met. Your justice and mine." ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HIDDEN TALENT

by Helen Tucker

If Caley Potter had lived today, what he had would have been called a disease which could and should be treated. But back in the 'thirties, Caley's heyday, it was called a bad habit, a vice, and even, by some, a sin. However, most people in Laurelton smiled when Caley's name was mentioned, because what he had wasn't contagious, there wasn't a speck of harm in him, and he was a pleasant fellow.

Caley Potter was the town drunk. He was fifty years old and looked sixty-five with his sparse gray hair, mottled complexion, and slightly stooped shoulders.

The one person in town who simply couldn't abide Caley was the mayor, Thomas Baxter. Baxter was a staunch Methodist who thought drinking was the devil's way of capturing souls for hell. He himself had signed The Pledge at an early age.

Hardly anyone in the town of three thousand had ever seen Caley completely sober. He started nipping in the morning, sipping at noon, and by night had settled down to serious drinking.

He hadn't held a job in years. After ten years of a shaky marriage, his wife Polly, a seamstress, divorced him. No one knew how he subsisted, but the consensus was that Polly (who apparently still loved him but couldn't live with him) gave him some of her hard-earned money from time to time, and once in a while, Rafe Hollcut let Caley sweep out his feed store for a dollar or two.

Once, thinking he was doing Caley a favor, Rafe went through Caley's pockets, found a pint bottle of rye, and flushed the contents down the toilet. Watching him from a distance, Caley, without a word, finished sweeping the store, then, taking a knife, cut open a fifty-pound bag of oats and covered his newly swept floor. He was making his exit by the loading platform in the back of the

A former reporter for newspapers and radio, Helen Tucker now concentrates her efforts on fiction writing. From her home in Raleigh, North Carolina she turns out small tales of ordinary people—stories with the traditional flavor of the Golden Age. Ms. Tucker is one of the few authors for *EQMM* who still uses a typewriter, not a computer: perhaps this helps her to maintain her classical style.

©1999 by Helen Tucker

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

store when Rafe screamed at him, "Caley, where the hell you think you're going? Clean up this mess right now!"

"I'll clean it up when you replace my tonic," Caley said.

"Tonic, my rear end! You . . ."

"Rafe, you in here?" came from the front of the store.

"I'll be right back," Rafe said. "Don't you move." He rushed to the front room. In those lean days every customer was important. But when he got there the potential customer had already gone, and when he returned to the loading platform, the loaded Caley had gone also.

Rafe, shaking his head sadly, later told someone, "I guess Caley thought I was destroying his lifeline and he was just getting his revenge by spilling my oats." It was impossible for him to get really mad at Caley for something he himself had instigated.

Caley lived in one room over the Esso filling station, an accommodation that cost him nothing in return for keeping away burglars. All the local people knew that by eight o'clock on any given night, Caley would be in his nocturnal stupor, but burglars from out of town might be deterred by seeing a light in the living quarters above the station. At least, that's what Norris Payton, the station manager, counted on. Actually, Norris just plain liked Caley, and even more, liked to listen to Caley whistle.

Caley had one powerful talent that caused everyone in Laurelton to look at him with awe. If angels could whistle, they would sound like Caley. He could triple-tongue and trill and do all sorts of things that no one could put a name to but that everybody went ape over. And the most amazing thing was that he whistled mostly classical music: Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture,* and Beethoven's *Ode to Joy,* and Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring,* and the Mozart *Alleluia.* Nobody had the faintest idea where he'd ever *heard* the music, much less heard it often enough to know every note.

Yet it was this very talent that got Caley in the worst trouble of his life, the trouble that caused the people of Laurelton to look at him with disdain instead of kindly tolerance.

Some of the students at the high school got the notion that if, with a little practice, they could whistle like Caley, they could start a whistling band. Something that had never been heard of before. Then they could be on *The Amateur Hour* on national radio and win a lot of money.

So twenty students from the junior and senior classes began to hunt Caley out every afternoon after school and sit at his feet like disciples in back of the Esso station while he did his best to teach them.

After a week or so, Caley was ready to give up. "I don't think this is working out," he said. "Whistling is a gift from God, and if you ain't got the gift, you might as well fergit it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But they didn't want to "fergit it." By then they were all enthralled with Caley, his benign, half-crooked smile, his don't-give-a-damn attitude toward every issue about which their parents nagged them, and his acceptance of them as his equals, not children. So when Caley decided to stop the lessons, the students followed him around town, begging him to continue.

That's when Mayor Thomas Baxter blew his cork, because two of his children, Betty Sue, a senior, and Nelson, a junior, were among Caley's most steadfast admirers.

"A Pied Piper, that's what he is," Mayor Baxter told his wife. "An instrument of the devil! He's leading our children to perdition. He's got to be stopped."

He talked to his children and they listened silently, nodded as though in agreement, then went right back to Caley.

When the mayor found out that neither talk nor threats of punishment would accomplish the desired results, he decided to have a talk with Caley himself.

Every day at noon, Caley went to the kitchen door of Mrs. Beasley's Dining Room on Main Street. If Mrs. Beasley happened to be in the kitchen, Caley paid a quarter for whatever was called the "Sandwich of the Day." If Mrs. Beasley was serving in the dining room, her chief cook and dishwasher slipped Caley a sandwich gratis. Caley then would take his lunch down to the Tar River and eat it sitting on the bank.

It was there that the mayor found him. "Caley, I want a few words with you."

"Make it very few," Caley muttered, *sotto voce.* Getting into any verbal sparring with this silver-tongued politician might spoil his lunch.

The mayor wouldn't lower himself to sit on the bank beside Caley, so he stood over him, while Caley calmly munched on his egg-salad sandwich. "Caley, you are setting a bad example, a really rotten example for the youth of this town."

"How so?"

"For starters, you drink like a fish . . ."

"How you know fish drink? You ever seen one drink?"

". . . and you stagger around town trying to influence all the young people, and . . ."

"I ain't trying to influence nobody."

"Nevertheless, you are doing it, and I and all the other parents in this town want it stopped."

"How can I stop something I never started?"

Mayor Baxter cleared his throat. "You stay away from the children of this town or, I'm warning you, the consequences will be dire. You're nothing but a drunken old fool, a tool of the devil . . ." The mayor broke off suddenly and looked toward a giant oak tree

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a few feet away. "Who's back of that tree eavesdropping?" he called. "Come out and show yourself."

Caley stared at him. "How you know somebody's back there?"

"He spoke. Didn't you hear him? He said, 'Judge not . . .' Uh, and then he added something else."

Caley shrugged. "I didn't hear nothing. Maybe your conscience is talking to you."

In a much softer tone, the mayor said, "Look Caley, I'm not enjoying this conversation, and I really regret that I felt it necessary. But it's my duty to protect our young. And what would people think of me if I didn't do my duty?" With that, he started back up the bank toward his car.

"You wouldn't worry about what people think of you if you realized how seldom they do," Caley called.

The mayor went back to his office, knowing that nothing would be changed, yet loath to give up his campaign in spite of the voice that had told him to judge not lest he be judged. He spent hours, days, trying to think of some way to end this monstrous hero-worship of the town drunk.

The idea came to him one afternoon as he was driving home and saw Caley staggering toward the Esso station, the inevitable pint bottle in his sagging pocket. Early the next morning he was in the office of the chief of police.

"Robby, this afternoon around five-thirty, I want you to arrest Caley Potter for public drunkenness and put him in jail."

The chief blinked and looked at the mayor as though the man had suddenly spilled his marbles all over the floor.

"You hear me?" the mayor asked sternly. "Do it without fail."

"But Thomas, why? Caley never hurt one living soul."

"Because I said so. And you're to leave him in jail for twenty-four hours."

Next, the mayor went to the high-school principal's office.

"Walter, I want to take your junior and senior classes on a little field trip tomorrow at two o'clock. Give them a lesson in civics, a lesson that will make better citizens of them."

The following afternoon, an unseasonably hot, for April, ninety-two degrees, Mayor Baxter, with sixty-four students in tow, went to the little brick jailhouse where Caley was the only "resident." Outside, the mayor described the dreadful results of drinking, calling it the worst sin man could commit, because it made man cast off his own nature and take on the devil's. Then he went into detail about the horrors of being in prison, what it did to one's reputation for the rest of one's life.

Next, he took them inside, through the office and the big door that led to the three stiflingly hot cells. And there sat Caley in one of the cells, on a bare cot that was attached to a cinder-block wall.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caley, his face dark with stubble, had on boxer shorts and a sweat-soaked undershirt, nothing else. His trousers and shirt were beside the cot on the floor. On seeing the audience crowding around the cell, Caley's mouth dropped open as though he were about to speak, but no words came out.

"Here is the perfect example of what I was telling you about," the mayor said. "This man has been a firm friend of Demon Rum all his life. He is a good-for-nothing who can't hold a job, can't support a family, can't even qualify as a human being."

The students' mouths were agape, and their expressions changed quickly to disgust. As one, they turned around and left the cell room and the jail.

"Jesus wept!" Caley cried, finding his voice. His surprise was even greater than that of his observers. "I'll get you for this, Thomas Baxter," he screeched. "You see if I don't. Revenge will be sweet!"

But for Caley, the era of tolerance had ended. He could tell by the looks he got from everyone in town. The looks told him he might as well have been something bad they stepped on in a cow pasture for all the respect he got. The word of his downfall had spread quickly. Students no longer sought him out, indeed, they crossed the street if they happened to see him. He had to pay for *all* his sandwiches at Mrs. Beasley's. And, worst of all, nobody asked him to whistle anymore.

With great difficulty, he even cut down considerably on his drinking, but that didn't bring back a smidgen of what he'd lost—or rather, what had been stolen from him by the mayor. The life he had known was gone forever.

Days, weeks, and months passed, and although the town waited for Caley to carry out his threat against the mayor, nothing happened. There was no act of revenge. Caley made no effort to get back at the man he despised for ruining him.

Four years later, Thomas Baxter died, and his funeral at the Methodist Church was the largest, grandest ever held in Laurelton. So many people attended that the Sunday-school rooms behind the main auditorium had to be opened to accommodate the crowd. Surprisingly, even Caley Potter attended.

The organist outdid herself, and a quartet singing "Abide With Me" brought tears to many eyes. Then there was Scripture read, followed by enough eulogies to run the service almost two hours.

It was after the final prayer, when all was quiet, that a low moan seemed to come from the casket. And then another, louder.

In the stunned, unnatural silence, people looked at each other, some turning pale. A child's voice, heard all over the church, piped, "Mama, he ain't dead."

Phillip Hassel, the undertaker, motioned for the pallbearers to come forth, but nobody moved. Then a voice came from the casket

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

saying, "Oh, please have mercy! Let me out of here. The Lord won't let me in heaven and the devil said I'm too mean for hell. So they sent me back. Christ Almighty! Let me out of here!"

Some of the people screamed, others looked on the verge of fainting, and all of them made a frantic, panic-stricken rush for the door, even Phillip Hassel.

Caley Potter, who had been sitting on the right side of the church near the front, was the last one out. At the door, he turned and gave the casket a mock salute. There was a little smile on his face as he murmured, "Gotcha!"

"You sure did, Caley," came from the casket. "You had the last word."

Caley was so accomplished that his lips hardly moved at all when he threw his voice. ●

(continued from p.40) Manny and I were interested in the rock.

Our first thought, I remember, was to place the crime in an unusual locale. We selected a public library; but from the beginning we knew this was wrong, even blasphemous. A public library was . . . . . too sacred a place to be defiled by crime: murder in a public library was unthinkable. We changed the locale to a museum. Now, please keep remembering this was . . . our age of growing pains. We had read voraciously, but our wings of creativity were untried. We fumbled, groped, strained. I can recall, almost as if it were last week, the two of us strolling home, discussing heatedly, sparking ideas, laughing at the patently ridiculous suggestions, and finally coming up with the concept of murder in a locked room.

In those days there were no elaborate alarm or security systems—at least, not to our knowledge. We imagined a room in the museum, with all doors and windows locked on the inside, and a body found dead behind a desk. How had the murderer gained access? He had hidden all day in a suit of armor, and at night he had got out of the armor (don't ask me how, we never asked such crucial questions in those days), killed his enemy (the victim had to be an enemy, but we didn't bother with the actual motive), locked all the doors and windows on the inside, and got back into the suit of armor.

We visualized the armor as standing on a large base, and this base covered a hole in the floor. Somehow . . . the murderer slipped down through the armor, through the base and the hole in the floor, and dropped to the room below. We knew what made the hole in the floor invisible—the base of the armor covered it. But what made the hole in the ceiling below invisible?—We never got around to that. Who was the victim? Who was the killer? Why was the murder committed? Strangely enough, these vital questions didn't trouble us; in lofting our first trial balloon . . . we were not concerned with the who or the why. We concentrated on the how, and it is *(continued p.197)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Circle of Ink

by Edward D. Hoch

It had been decades since Ellery Queen lectured on Applied Criminology at a university, and the changes that time had wrought were immediately obvious, even to his nonacademic eye. Classroom dress had become so casual, for students and instructors alike, that he dared not venture into those august halls in anything like the English tweeds he'd worn a generation earlier. Yet the tools of learning that his audience of undergraduates possessed were anything but casual. There were tape recorders and laptop computers ready to capture every word and impression he might scatter across the vast lecture hall.

The university is a perfect setting for an Ellery Queen story, for the Harvard-educated sleuth has been heard to quote Latin and Greek and is well versed in the classics. Unlike the other Queen stories in this issue, this pastiche brings in two characters necessary to complete our portrait of the Queen world: Inspector Richard Queen, Ellery's father, and the rough-spoken Sergeant Velie. The plot of this miniature novel has conscious parallels to certain of the real Queen novels. †

On this Tuesday in early May the subject was "The Detective Story," part of a seminar on modern writing in which he'd agreed to participate. The task, urged on him by Associate Professor Virgil Meadler, was not all that onerous, consisting of a single hour's lecture followed by a question period. Ellery was amused to note that even in a college classroom someone still asked him where writers got their ideas, and he mentioned it to Professor Meadler while they chatted at the conclusion of the session.

"I know," Meadler said. "They all want to be writers and they think there's some secret formula to it." He was a tall, handsome man in his early thirties, wearing rimless glasses that blended well with his angular face. When he'd first called Ellery to invite him to the seminar he admitted to having read only one Queen novel. "But my mother is a great fan of yours," he'd quickly added.

"Well," Ellery told him now, "I think the session went well. A few of them even had books for me to sign afterward."

©1999 by Edward D. Hoch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It went splendidly! I only wish all of our guest lecturers were as good as you."

As he parted from Meadler in the lecture hall, he was aware of a tall, attractive young woman heading down the aisle in his direction. One more book to sign, he guessed, and greeted her with a pleasant smile.

"Mr. Queen?" she asked, producing a tape recorder from her voluminous purse. "I'm Pia Straton, coanchor of Channel Three News."

"And you want to ask me where I get my ideas," Ellery murmured.

She tossed her curly brown hair as if rejecting the idea. "I want to ask you if you're here at the university to help your father investigate the murder of Professor Androvney."

He was taken off guard by her question. "What's that?"

"You are the son of Inspector Richard Queen, are you not?"

"I haven't spoken to Dad all week. We lead separate lives. I don't know anything about a murder."

She seemed about to pursue it, but a young man carrying a television camera on his shoulder had appeared in the lecture-hall doorway. "Pia, it looks like they're leaving!"

"I'm coming!" She snapped off the tape recorder and bolted up the aisle without even a goodbye. Ellery stared after her until she disappeared from view, then strode up the aisle himself.

On his way out to the parking lot he came upon Professor Meadler deep in conversation with an older, white-haired man. They broke off their talk as he approached, and Meadler held out his arm. "Ellery, I want you to meet our Dean of Arts and Letters, Professor Charles Cracken, our foremost authority on Dante. Charles, this is Ellery Queen. I was just telling you what a fine lecture he gave."

The man shook hands with Ellery. "Ah, yes, Mr. Queen. I have enjoyed your books."

"Thank you."

Virgil Meadler smiled. "He needs something to read besides that old fourteenth-century literature he teaches." It seemed like a continuation of some friendly ribbing from the past.

"I hope my books help you to relax," Ellery said. His eyes had gone to the other side of the parking lot where he could see a group of students surrounding some police cars and a windowless white van he recognized as the morgue wagon. "A reporter was just asking me if I knew anything about a murder. Have you had some trouble here?"

Dean Cracken's face turned serious. "One of our associate professors was found shot to death in his office. We're trying not to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

comment about it until we know the facts. Unfortunately, someone tipped off the news people."

"I've found it's very difficult to keep murder quiet."

"We don't know the circumstances," Meadler told him. "Professor Androvney was a troubled man with many problems. He may have shot himself."

Professor Cracken shook his head sadly. "The man had great potential. I was hoping one day he would replace me as dean."

Ellery caught sight of his father getting into one of the unmarked cars. He decided he'd have to call him that evening.

"Dad, how've you been?"

Richard Queen's voice was raspy, as if he might be getting a spring cold. "Can't complain, Ellery. Doing well for an old man. I heard you were at the university today."

"I saw you at a distance. What's this about some professor being shot?"

"That's the least of it," he replied with a sigh. "Can you come over tonight?"

"Sure, I'll be there right after dinner."

"Come now. You know how Jesse loves to feed you."

Jesse Sherwood had been a brisk and buxom nurse approaching fifty when Richard Queen took a bride for the second time in his life. Ellery was both surprised and delighted by the event, especially when he observed his father's renewed vigor and joy of living. There was no more talk of full retirement from the NYPD, though he had worked out an arrangement allowing more time for them to travel.

Ellery arrived at his father's place on the stroke of six and was surprised to find them both in front of the television set watching the Channel Three Nightly News. He recognized Pia Straton's curly brown hair on the screen immediately. "Channel Three News has learned through reliable sources in the police department that the murder of Professor Androvney in his office at the university today may be linked to four other shooting deaths on the Upper West Side during the past few weeks. Police refuse to speculate that this is the work of a serial killer, but Ellery Queen, the noted author and amateur detective, was observed on the campus this afternoon."

"Is this true?" Ellery asked. "There've been four previous killings?"

Inspector Queen looked grim. "We were hoping to keep it quiet until there was some sort of lead. You remember what happened with the Cat stranglings some years back. The whole town went wild."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There'll be no keeping it a secret now, not with the media on it. Show me what you've got, Dad."

He pulled over the fancy leather briefcase Ellery had given him for his sixtieth birthday and removed a stack of files. "These are my own copies," he explained. "The originals are in the office. I knew this damned briefcase would come in handy for something." The briefcase had led to a lot of kidding from Sergeant Velie and others, and Inspector Queen stopped carrying it. Ellery had reluctantly agreed that he'd never been the briefcase type.

"There are four cases?" Ellery asked, staring at the folders on the coffee table. Jesse had gone off to the kitchen.

"Four before today, Ellery. Take a look."

The first one chronologically was Mavis O'Toole, a call girl with a lengthy arrest record. The police figured she'd been gunned down by her pimp or some rival. It had happened nearly a month ago, on Tuesday, April sixth, two days after Easter. Eight days later a middle-class butcher named Frank Otter had been killed as he emerged from a Broadway steak house.

Ellery studied the morgue shot of the corpulent man. "He liked to eat."

"That he did," the old man agreed.

"How do you know it was the same killer?"

"Two things. The same gun, a twenty-two-caliber target pistol, was used in both killings. Since no one heard a shot outside the steak house, it's probably equipped with a silencer. No shots were heard in the other killings either."

"The markings on the bullets match?"

Inspector Queen nodded. "I know what you're going to say, Ellery. A twenty-two target pistol with a silencer is a favorite weapon for a mob hit. But Frank Otter had no mob connections we can find."

"Mistaken identity?"

"That's always a possibility."

"What about the other two?"

His father opened the next folder. "Sidney James, a landlord known locally as the Miser of Morningside Heights. He was shot while jogging in Morningside Park. That was two weeks ago today. Then, last Friday, a second woman was killed. Laura Autumn, president of the Autumn Agency, a small marketing firm. She was shot as she was entering her apartment building on Cathedral Parkway, around the corner from St. John the Divine. She had a bag of groceries from the Morningside Shopping Mall nearby. Until we got a match on the bullets we thought she'd been shot by one of several employees she'd fired last week after an angry outburst in the office."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Dad, you said two things proved these were the work of one killer. What's the other thing, besides the gun?"

"There was a small red circle on the back of each victim's left hand. It was done in ink, probably by a rubber stamp."

Then Jesse was calling them for dinner.

In the morning the killings were front-page news, and Ellery found them the lead story on the television news as well. There were even photographs of the three male and two female victims. The stories revealed that they'd all been shot with the same gun, but made no mention of the ink circle on the back of their hands. One of the tabloids had provided a map of the Upper West Side with each crime scene marked with a convenient X. It showed that the killings formed a rough circle with the university at the center.

Perhaps that was all the killer intended. Perhaps the murders would stop now.

But Ellery wasn't betting on it. Just before noon he took the subway up to Morningside Heights.

The neighborhood had always been an area in transition, for as long as Ellery could remember. Old brick apartment houses from the 'twenties and earlier now served as off-campus housing for undergraduates, and an abandoned armory had been turned into the Morningside Shopping Mall. As he was approaching this solid-looking structure, a familiar figure came hurrying out, past the food vendors that surrounded the entrance. He realized it was Virgil Meadler, his host at the university the previous day. The professor, carrying no obvious purchases, headed in the opposite direction and Ellery decided to take a look at Manhattan's version of a shopping mall.

His first impression was of a welter of signs proclaiming everything from *Flowers and Plants for Your Terrace Gardens* to *Supplies for the Student and Home Office.* There was even one that read *Your Parking Free Next-Door if You Make a Purchase!* The mammoth armory had been converted into a warren of small and medium-sized shops serving just about any need. A fortuneteller announced her trade with a neatly lettered sign: *Madame Beatrice—Reader Advisor—No Appointment Necessary.* A bald man in a turtleneck sweater was just leaving as Ellery strolled by. Further along he found a sporting-goods store that sold .22-caliber target pistols. He looked them over for several minutes and inquired about buying one but was told he needed a permit to purchase a handgun in New York state, even for target practice. He'd known that, of course, but he was just testing the market. "I got to obey the laws," the clerk told him. "Too bad these goons selling guns on every street corner don't have to."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On his way back to the entrance, Ellery saw a tall, slender woman standing in the open doorway of the fortuneteller's shop, by a beaded curtain. She had long gray hair and was probably close to sixty. He noticed her watching him and strolled over. "Would you like a free reading?" she asked, extending a deck of cards.

Ellery smiled. "I thought fortunetellers used crystal balls."

"I have one if you'd prefer," she answered. "Made of the finest Waterford."

He knew she was playing with him then and he followed her inside. "Aren't fortunetellers unusual in Manhattan these days?" he said.

"There are hundreds of us if you know where to look. I've been doing it for over thirty years. Check the phone book sometime." She'd seated herself behind a small, plain table and placed the cards there. Behind her, a dark velvet drape hid the wall of the shop, and a few pillows were scattered on the floor.

"I suppose I don't get out as much as I should," Ellery murmured. "What do you want me to do, pick a card and you'll tell me its meaning?"

Madame Beatrice smiled wisely. "Oh, I'm certain you know the meaning of all the cards, Mr. Queen. You wrote a mystery novel about it once."

He was momentarily at a loss for words. This woman had not only recognized him but remembered a novel he'd written decades earlier. He recovered enough to ask, "Is my face that well known in these parts, or are you a mind reader as well as a fortuneteller?"

She pulled aside the velvet drape to reveal bookshelves lined with modern novels, predominantly mysteries. He recognized at least a dozen of his titles among them. "On slow days I do lots of reading," she admitted. "You've always been one of my favorites, and your photo is on the jackets. I have to hide them from my clients, though. They would expect me to be reading something far more esoteric."

"You'd make a fine detective," Ellery told her. "You probably encounter all classes of people."

"I do indeed," Madame Beatrice told him. She seemed to hesitate and then went on. "My last client, not ten minutes ago, is a violent man awaiting sentencing for assaulting a taxi driver. He wondered if the cards could indicate the length of his prison stay."

Ellery remembered the bald man in the turtleneck. "I imagined your customers to be young girls wondering when they'd marry."

The fortuneteller snorted. "More likely young girls wondering if they are with child, although those have fallen off with the popularity of home pregnancy tests."

He nodded, a smile playing about his lips. "Much more accurate than a deck of cards." He started to leave. "It was a pleasure meeting you, Madame Beatrice."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Will you sign one of your books before you go?"

"Certainly." He took out a pen. "Whichever one you'd like."

"I suppose it should be the one about the cards," she decided, taking down *The Four of Hearts.*

As he left the converted armory and started across the street he became aware of a cluster of police cars, not unlike those he'd seen at the university the previous day. They were by the entrance to a ramp garage next to the armory. "Ellery!" a familiar voice called out, and he saw his father waving to him.

He hurried over to join the old man. "What is it, Dad? Not another—"

"Dead man in a car, shot in the head. We may have another one. I'm on my way up now to take a look." His face was grim. "Come along."

Inspector Queen moved up the ramp to the second level with remarkable speed for a man his age, and Ellery had to hurry to keep pace. Sergeant Velie and an assistant medical examiner were already on the scene, along with police technicians and the garage manager. The body was slumped over the steering wheel of a blue compact car, and a bullet wound in the left temple was obvious.

"Looks like a twenty-two caliber again," Velie said, with a nod toward Ellery.

"The circle on his hand?" Inspector Queen asked.

"It's there."

The assistant medical examiner moved out of the way, and Ellery got his first look at the body. He recognized the bald man in the turtleneck, Madame Beatrice's last customer. "I just saw this man in the mall!"

"His driver's license says his name is Warren Cashmere. The dashboard computer came up with an arrest record for a few assaults."

"I didn't know his name, Dad, but I just saw him next-door, coming out of the fortuneteller's."

"How long ago was that?"

"Maybe forty, forty-five minutes."

The medical examiner looked up and nodded. "Sounds about right. He hasn't been dead long."

"Woman parked next to him reported the body," Sergeant Velie said. "The driver's window was open. Someone walked up to the car and shot him."

"Not someone he feared," Ellery observed, "or he wouldn't have rolled down the window. People don't usually park their cars with the windows open." He leaned over for a closer look and saw the little red circle stamped on the back of the victim's left hand.

"What does that damned circle mean?" his father asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Some sort of organization? There's an old Edgar Wallace novel called *The Crimson Circle—*"

But the garage manager, a stout black man named Martin King, had a more prosaic explanation. "The mall customers can get stamped like that when they buy something. I give 'em free parking."

Inspector Queen was unhappy. Too many things were happening too fast. "That Channel Three woman, Pia Straton, has been on my neck," he grumbled.

"Mine too," Ellery agreed. The body had been removed and they were leaving the ramp garage. "You'll want to have Velie question the mall's fortuneteller, Madame Beatrice. She told me the victim was awaiting sentencing for assaulting a taxi driver. He came in to find out how long he'd be locked up."

The inspector grunted. "He won't have to worry about that now." As they parted he said, "Let's set up a meeting at my office tomorrow morning. Meantime I'll try to find out how many of the victims had a connection with the Morningside Shopping Mall."

"I can help on that, Dad," Ellery volunteered. "I'll talk to Professor Androvney's friends at the university."

"Good."

Ellery found Virgil Meadler in his little office on the second floor of the Arts and Letters building, staring out the partly opened window at some sort of demonstration on the quadrangle. "What is it?" Ellery asked. "Graduation fever?"

"Nothing so ordinary. For its last event of the academic year, the student council invited Uncle Sam Tusker to speak here Friday afternoon."

Ellery remembered reading something about it in the papers months ago. Uncle Sam Tusker, a former government employee, had been charged with treason the previous year for selling certain classified information to unnamed Middle Eastern countries. A man of benevolent appearance with white hair and an Uncle Sam goatee, he'd pleaded he was merely trying to fulfill the somewhat ambiguous instructions he'd received. A jury believed him, and he was acquitted of the treason charge, causing an uproar in the press. Now he was speaking at college campuses, ostensibly to pay off his legal expenses. Protesters believed he was spreading an anti-American message.

"Not a very pleasant ending to a week that's already seen a campus murder," Ellery observed.

"What can we do?" Meadler asked with a shrug. "The university has always been a forum for dissent, and after all, the man was acquitted by a jury." He shuffled some papers on his desk. "Now what brings you here, Ellery? I have to tell you my students are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

still talking about your entertaining lecture yesterday. They learned a great deal from it."

"I'm glad of that. Actually, there's been another murder."

"Another since yesterday?"

"Afraid so. This morning, in the parking garage adjoining the Morningside Shopping Mall. I'm helping my father with the investigation and I wanted to ask you a bit more about Professor Androvney. Did he have any enemies on campus?"

"Not really. There are always some disgruntled students around. He was a heretic of a sort, always going against prevailing opinion on just about any subject. That irritated some of the students. But then, I suppose you can find one or two such people among the faculty on any campus."

"Did he spend much time at the Morningside Shopping Mall?"

Virgil Meadler snorted. "Androvney hated the place! He'd never go near it. He thought the old armory should have been converted into an arts center."

"That's odd," Ellery said. His father was leaning now toward a theory that the ink circle on the victims' hands was not left by the killer but was merely a sign the victims had recently shopped at Morningside.

"Have you been to the mall?" the professor asked.

Ellery smiled. "Just this morning. I had a nice chat with your mother."

"My—" The surprise was evident on his face.

"Madame Beatrice is your mother, isn't she?"

"She told you?"

"She didn't have to. I saw you coming out of the mall earlier today, without any packages. You'd told me your mother was a fan of my books, and when I met Madame Beatrice she showed me her Queen collection. You were there visiting her this morning, weren't you?"

He seemed annoyed at Ellery's discovery. "I'm certainly not ashamed of what my mother does. She raised me as a single parent and saw to it that I had every scholarship opportunity. I owe all this to her," he said with a wave of his arm. "She comes to see me occasionally and I stop by to see her. But I don't want a situation where my students start pestering her to predict what marks I'll give them. She runs her own operation, and I'm the first to admit she's something of a con artist. Her little table has a hidden drawer so she can vanish or produce cards pretty much on demand. She gives customers the readings she thinks they want. Nothing wrong with that, I suppose, but it's best that we lead separate lives as much as possible."

"I understand perfectly. She's a most pleasant woman. She's become involved in this only because the latest victim visited her for a reading just before he was killed." Ellery filled him in on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

details. "There seems to be a connection between the mall and some of the victims." He didn't elaborate about the inked circles found on their hands.

"Is there any common link between these people?" Meadler asked.

"None that we've found. We have a call girl, a butcher, a landlord, a marketing executive, a literature professor, and now a petty criminal. Nothing in common except they all lived or worked in this general area."

"I suppose victims of serial killers don't usually have much in common, unless the crimes are sexual in nature."

Ellery leaned back in his chair. "The term *serial killer* is popular these days, but it shouldn't be confused with series killers, ones who kill a certain number of people with a goal in mind. A serial killer usually keeps on until he's caught. A series killer will stop after achieving his goal."

"I don't see where there's much difference. They're both insane."

"But in the case of a series killer the insanity has been twisted into a pattern the killer can see. If you find the pattern, you find the killer."

"You sound as if you've had experience with this."

"A little," Ellery admitted. "One time—"

There was a knock on the door and Dean Cracken poked his head in. "Sorry, Virgil. I was next door in my office and I didn't know you were occupied."

Ellery stood up. "I was just leaving."

"No, no, sit down! As a matter of fact, I wanted to speak with you too, Mr. Queen. My wife just phoned from home to say there's been another killing. She saw it on the news." He'd come all the way into the office and set his bulging briefcase on the floor. It reminded Ellery of the one he'd given his father as a Christmas gift. "Is that true?"

"I'm afraid so," Ellery acknowledged. He quickly described the killing at the mall, leaving out mention of Madame Beatrice.

"Will this thing never end?" Dean Cracken asked.

"Mr. Queen thinks it'll end if we can discover the pattern behind it," Meadler told him.

"Pattern?"

"I don't believe the killings are random," Ellery said. "There's a pattern, and the killer wants us to find it. Otherwise, why use a weapon that can be so easily identified? Most series killers use a knife or some form of strangulation. They rarely commit a string of killings using the same handgun."

"Do you think it's someone on campus?"

"On campus or at the mall or in the neighborhood. That's all I can say with some certainty."

The dean shook his head sadly and then turned to Professor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Meadler. "Virgil, my other problem is that I traditionally introduce the student council's final speaker of the year. It's going to be very difficult for me to say anything good about Uncle Sam Tusker. I was wondering if you had any suggestions."

The demonstration out on the quadrangle had grown noisy again, as if to punctuate the dean's request. Meadler closed the window and said, only half humorously, "Tell them he's your favorite traitor and let it go at that."

"You're no help. Can you imagine the gall of the man, billing himself as Uncle Sam when he was just acquitted of treason! I've been here thirty-five years and this is the first traitor we've ever invited to speak at the university. And I have to write up some remarks welcoming him!"

"Keep your briefcase handy in case the demonstrators start throwing eggs. It makes an effective shield."

"Don't worry, I will. My wife calls it my security blanket. Someday I'll even look inside it. I think I still have lecture notes in there from last semester."

"If you're really worried," Ellery suggested, "you could have the audience pass through a metal detector on the way in."

"I hope we haven't come to that," Dean Cracken answered sourly.

After he'd left, Ellery asked, "Does he always carry the briefcase?"

"Usually he forgets it and leaves it in the lecture hall or his office. One of the students has to retrieve it for him."

"He must be nearing retirement age."

Meadler nodded. "Two more years. Androvney was in line to head up Arts and Letters until he got himself killed. Now I don't know who'll get it."

"Start campaigning," Ellery said with a wink.

Pia Straton was waiting for him at his apartment downtown. "Mr. Queen," she called out, running up to him.

He glanced around. "Where's your camera today?"

"It's just me. I want to talk about these killings, off the record."

Ellery hesitated only a moment. "All right, come on up. But it's strictly off the record."

He led her to the fifth floor and unlocked the door to his apartment overlooking the East River. "What a view!" she exclaimed. "You can see all the way down to the Brooklyn Bridge."

"It lifts my spirits," he admitted. "I suppose you're here because of the latest killing." They sat down opposite each other.

"That's number six, right? And the first time there've been two in two days."

"Correct."

"What does it mean?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Off the record? We may be heading toward a climax, if only we can work out the pattern in time to avoid it."

"Pattern? Then you don't think these are random killings?"

"No, there's a pattern. It just starts in the wrong place."

He could see the anticipation in her eyes. "Can you make that a bit clearer to me, Mr. Queen? Ellery?"

"I'm afraid not. What I've got is only the beginning of an idea, and I may be entirely wrong."

"Is there any way I can help?"

He thought about that. "Do you know this man Uncle Sam Tusker?"

"I interviewed him once after his acquittal."

"He's speaking at the university Friday afternoon. I'd like to meet with him before his speech."

She nodded. "I could arrange that. But how can Tusker be connected with the killings?"

"I didn't say he was," Ellery told her. "You'll just have to trust me."

At ten o'clock the following morning he was in his father's familiar office at One Police Plaza. Sergeant Velie was there too, along with two other detectives assigned to the case. "We have forty men and women in all working on it," Inspector Queen said, "and I have authorization to double that if need be. We need to crack this thing, Ellery. Do you have anything for us?"

"Some vague ideas, nothing I can put into words yet."

Against one wall of the office was a large blackboard on which had been placed photographs of the six victims. Each was numbered, beginning with the call girl, Mavis O'Toole. "We've definitely placed her at the shopping mall," the old man said. "She was well known in the neighborhood. The next two, Frank Otter and Sidney James, also shopped there."

Ellery nodded. "And Laura Autumn. She was carrying a bag from the mall when she was shot. But we've got problems with number five. I understand Professor Androvney hated the place and wouldn't go near it."

"Do we know how long this circle of ink lasts after it's stamped on the customers' hands?" the inspector asked.

"It wears off in a day," Velie answered, "sooner with one or two vigorous washings."

There was a phone call from the medical examiner's office and Velie took it. He listened for a moment and then passed the phone to Ellery's dad. "You'd better take this. It's important."

Richard Queen swore only on rare occasions, but this was one of them. He hung up and said, to no one in particular, "There's another one."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Just this morning, Dad?"

The old man shook his head. "Friday, April second. Four days before Mavis O'Toole. I guess that shoots our theories all to hell."

"How do they know—?"

"The victim was a Korean convenience-store owner named Kim Hwan, up on Amsterdam Avenue. He was shot once in the chest that evening and robbery appeared to be the motive, although nothing was taken. Someone in the lab just remembered the murder weapon was a twenty-two and compared the bullet to the ones in our recent killings. It matched."

"The red circle, Dad?" Ellery asked anxiously.

"There was no red circle. Nobody noticed one and nothing shows on the morgue photos."

They all stared silently at the blackboard.

Finally, Ellery got up and went to the board. He erased the numbers by each photograph and wrote in *1. Kim Hwan.* Then he numbered the others in their proper order. "So we have seven victims instead of six."

"What does it mean, Ellery?"

"Do we have any record of Kim Hwan's funeral?"

"Funeral? How can that possibly matter?"

"It might, Dad." He turned to Sergeant Velie. "We need details of the funeral service."

"You got it, Ellery." He went off to check the records.

"You're on the trail of something," his father said. "I know that pensive expression."

"It's so wild I hate to put it into words, at least not quite yet."

The inspector sent the other two detectives off to bolster their patrols of the Morningside Heights neighborhood. When they were alone, he asked, "Will there be more killings?"

"Not if we can stop them. Not if I can beat the killer to his eighth victim."

Sergeant Velie returned, looking smug. "That was easy. His widow says he was a Buddhist back in the old country, but he never practiced it here. There was no religious service, and the body was cremated."

"Does that answer your question, Ellery?"

Suddenly it clicked into place, not everything, but an important part. "Come on, Dad! Velie, where's your car? We have to get up to that shopping mall before there's another killing."

"Who—?"

"A fortuneteller named Madame Beatrice. Come on!"

Ellery phoned the woman and warned her to be on her guard. "We're on the way up there," he said.

Velie used his siren all the way up Broadway, while Ellery's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

father called for additional support. They reached the mall seconds before two squad cars, and Ellery was already on the pavement, leading the way. Shoppers gawked and cleared a path for them. Ellery had Madame Beatrice's shop in sight when they heard the single shot. Velie and the inspector had their guns drawn as they burst through the beaded curtain. Madame Beatrice was on the floor behind her little table, bleeding from a wound in her side.

"That way," she gasped, pointing toward a fire exit in the rear of the shop. "He went that way."

Ellery and Velie were through the door in an instant, down an enclosed corridor that led to an outside fire door. The panic bar had a spot of blood on it, which Ellery pointed out to the sergeant as they went through. Then they were outside, next to the ramp garage, and the door had swung shut behind them.

"We'll have to go back around and in the front," Ellery said. "Get your men to search the garage."

"What are we looking for?"

"Anyone suspicious. He'll still have the gun on him. And probably traces of blood. He hasn't finished yet."

Ellery ran around to the front of the mall, where police were holding back a panicked crowd. "What is it?" Pia Straton yelled, rushing forward with her cameraman.

"You're always on the scene, aren't you?"

"It's my job. What happened?"

"Another shooting. You'll get details later." Then he pushed his way through to the fortuneteller's shop.

His father and one of the officers were on their knees beside the woman while the officer tried to stanch the flow of blood from her side. "Ambulance is on the way," the old man told him. "She's trying to talk."

Ellery knelt beside her. "It's Ellery Queen, Madame Beatrice."

"I know. I'm not dead yet."

"You're going to be all right. Do you know who shot you?"

"He pulled down a ski mask as he entered. I saw the gun and ducked as he fired. He came at me again and I tried to fight him off. He should have my blood on him."

"Don't worry, we'll get him." The ambulance crew arrived and Ellery had time for only one more question. "Did he try to put a circle on the back of your hand, maybe with a rubber stamp?"

"I don't know. God, this hurts! Give me something for the pain."

Ellery and his father stood up, turning her over to the ambulance attendants. Inspector Queen spoke in a low voice. "The bullet went through her dress and the fleshy part of her side, then out again. We're trying to find where it hit."

Madame Beatrice had been reading when the killer entered, and the drapes in front of her bookcase were partly open. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Velie who found the bullet, embedded in the spine of *The Innocence of Father Brown.* The lab people took it, along with the smear of blood from the fire-exit door.

"What do they say about her?" Ellery asked his father.

"She'll pull through, despite the loss of blood."

"Have someone phone the university and tell Professor Virgil Meadler about it, Dad."

"Why him?"

"She's his mother."

Friday was one of those warm May mornings in New York when dark clouds move across the sky threatening momentary downpours. Ellery purposely avoided reading the papers as he hurried through breakfast. That afternoon Uncle Sam Tusker would be speaking at the university, and Pia Straton had promised him a meeting before that. She'd called earlier to confirm their appointment and promised to pick him up at his building.

He paused only to call his father at Headquarters. "Dad, what's the news this morning?"

"Madame Beatrice, or Beatrice Meadler to use her proper name, is coming along fine. Her son's been up to see her. She may be released from the hospital tomorrow or Sunday. The lab boys verified that it was her blood on the fire-exit door all right, and they also verified that the bullet came from the same gun that killed seven people so far. It's madness, Ellery. The man's going to keep on killing until he's stopped."

"The end is in sight, Dad."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Instead of answering, Ellery asked, "Do you have a guard on Madame Beatrice?"

"Of course."

"She should be safe, but the person we're dealing with isn't completely rational."

"You can say that again! Where will you be if I need you?"

"At the university, for Uncle Sam Tusker's speech."

"That traitor!"

"Exactly, Dad. Here's what we have to do. Can Velie be at the university in twenty minutes . . . ?"

Pia Straton was waiting for him downstairs in the Channel 3 van. He got in and she cut over to Broadway, following the route he'd taken to the mall the previous day. "I hope you realize I'm doing you a big favor with this Uncle Sam business, Ellery, and I expect a big favor in return."

"What would that be?"

"I want an exclusive when you crack the case."

He smiled. "If I crack it, Pia, I promise you'll be there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Though it was not yet one, a crowd was already forming for the afternoon's talk. "Classes are about over," Pia explained as she found a parking space. "Next week is graduation." She hustled Ellery through a side door of the university theater and up the stairs to a private lounge where Virgil Meadler and a few others were waiting with the acquitted traitor. Ellery was relieved to see Sergeant Velie among them.

Uncle Sam Tusker was true to his press reports. A slender man in his sixties with white hair and a goatee, he did indeed resemble the traditional image of Uncle Sam. Ellery found it a bit disheartening that such a man might be preaching treason against his country. They shook hands as Pia introduced them, and Uncle Sam said, "I've heard a great deal about you, Mr. Queen. Something of an amateur detective, aren't you?"

"At times, when I'm not writing," Ellery admitted. "That's why I asked Pia to bring me here."

Uncle Sam smiled. "You can't be investigating me!"

Ellery glanced around the room and lowered his voice a bit. "My investigation has nothing to do with your politics, or with the charges brought against you. I have to tell you an attempt may be made to kill you today."

The smile became a laugh. "You know how many times my life's been threatened? I take that in stride. I'll tell you something, Mr. Queen. If you're alive you have to rile the passions of the people. I want them to rise up against the government or against myself, it doesn't matter which. The sound of shooting is better than the sound of silence."

"—the sound of—"

The door swung open and Dean Charles Cracken strode in, carrying his bulging briefcase.

Ellery knew. He knew it all now. It was madness, but he'd found the real pattern at last.

Virgil Meadler was introducing Tusker to the dean. "This is our Dean of Arts and Letters, Professor Charles Cracken. He'll make the opening remarks."

Dean Cracken was unbuckling his briefcase. "Perhaps you'd like to see what I'm going to say about you, Mr. Tusker."

Now, Ellery said: Stop him, Velie! But the words were frozen in his throat.

"—what I'm going to say about you, Mr. Tusker."

Stop him, Velie!

"Stop him, Velie! There's a gun in his briefcase!"

Dean Cracken looked up, startled, as Velie lunged at him, knocking the briefcase from his hands. It fell to the floor, spewing its contents, and there among them was the .22-caliber target pistol with its silenced barrel.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

❖❖❖

It was later that afternoon, after the excitement had passed, when Ellery, Inspector Queen, Sergeant Velie, and Pia Straton arrived at Madame Beatrice's hospital room. "How are you today?" Ellery asked.

"Can't complain," the fortuneteller told him. She was propped up in the hospital bed with two pillows behind her. "What's all this about?"

"We arrested the man who shot you. He was taken into custody this afternoon at the university."

"Anyone I know?"

"Dean Cracken," Ellery told her.

"Dean—"

"It seems he killed seven people over the past several weeks. You would have been eighth and Uncle Sam Tusker would have been ninth. That was the pattern."

"I guess you'd better explain it," she said, looking from Ellery to Inspector Queen.

"It's madness, of course, but series murders always are. Only a madman would kill nine people so they would fit into the nine circles of Dante's Hell."

Pia Straton, who'd been a silent observer until now, gave a little gasp and turned on her tape recorder. She'd wanted to bring a camera too, but Ellery had ruled that out. Inspector Queen said, "You'd better explain your reasoning, Ellery."

"Gladly. I learned the first time I ever met Dean Cracken that he was the university's foremost authority on Dante. He taught Dante, he knew Dante and *The Divine Comedy* better than anyone else. I became aware early on that the victims of these killings seemed to all have some character flaw—a call girl, an overweight butcher, a miserly landlord, a wrathful woman who fired her employees, a professor said to be a heretic, and a violent man facing a prison sentence for assaulting a taxi driver. They were almost the seven deadly sins, but not quite."

"But the nine circles of Dante's Hell, Ellery?" the old man asked. "I still need convincing."

"So did I, but it came with your discovery of an earlier killing, the true first in the series. A Korean shopkeeper, born a Buddhist but practicing no religion when he died. He was bound for Dante's first circle. Translations of *The Divine Comedy* vary, but generally it goes more or less like this. In the first circle is limbo, for the virtuous heathens. The second circle is reserved for the lustful and lascivious, the third for the gluttons, the fourth for the miserly, the fifth for the wrathful, the sixth for the heretics, the seventh for the violent."

"Which brings you to me," Madame Beatrice said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellery nodded. "The eighth circle, reserved for liars, fortune-tellers, thieves, and others. As soon as I knew the pattern, I guessed you'd be the next victim."

"And Uncle Sam Tusker?" Velie asked.

"The ninth circle, the very bottom of Dante's Hell, is reserved for traitors."

Even Pia Straton seemed spellbound by the enormity of it. "Has Dean Cracken confessed?"

"Not yet," Inspector Queen replied. "But we tested the gun in his briefcase this afternoon. It fired all seven of the fatal shots, and the bullet that wounded Madame Beatrice."

"Thank God it's over," the fortuneteller said with a sigh.

"Can I call this in to the station?" Pia Straton asked, anxious to catch the five o'clock local news.

"You can if you want," Ellery said. "But you may prefer to wait a few moments. You see, after all my clever reasoning, connecting Dean Cracken to these killings because he was the Dante expert, I overlooked two things. The first was the circle of red ink on the back of the victims' hands. It was missing from Kim Hwan's hand, but appeared on all the others until Madame Beatrice, where we interrupted the crime during its commission. What it told me was that the circle was a mere happenstance, not part of the original plan at all. Victims two through five had the circle simply because they'd received free parking at the shopping mall's ramp garage. When the killer realized this, it became a perfect way to tie Professor Androvney's killing in with the others, even though he never went to the mall."

His father's voice was solemn. "It still could be Cracken. What's the second thing you overlooked?"

"A fat man, a heathen, a miser, a fortuneteller, a traitor, might all be known in the community. But how would Cracken have known that Warren Cashmere was awaiting sentence for an act of violence? The pattern had to be completed today, remember, with the killing of Uncle Sam Tusker. How could he have known of Cashmere's crime and just where he'd be on Wednesday?"

"He might have known the man, read about it in the papers."

"No, Dad, it's not likely. There was something else too, something that revealed the truth to me yesterday. I played along today, knowing Tusker wouldn't be killed, just to see how far it would go."

Pia's finger was on the tape recorder button. "What are you saying?"

"That Dean Charles Cracken is innocent. He killed no one. The killer is lying here before us. Isn't that right, Madame Beatrice?"

Her eyes shifted to each of their faces in turn. "Why, that's impossible," she said after a moment's hesitation. "I'm the only one who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

couldn't have killed them. You're forgetting, Ellery, that you saw Warren Cashmere leaving my shop. And you were with me at the time he was killed."

"As I discovered yesterday, the back of your shop leads to a fire door that exits right next to the ramp garage where he was shot. You'd already stamped his hand with the circle when he paid you for reading his fortune, so you knew he was parked in the garage. You propped open the fire door, went into the garage, and shot him with your silenced target pistol, while I was looking at pistols in the mall's sporting-goods store. It would have taken you less than five minutes. When you saw me walking by, seconds after your return, you recognized me from my book-jacket photos and enticed me in for a perfect alibi. Perhaps you'd persuaded your son to invite me to the university in the first place. You wanted me to follow your false trail to Cracken."

"But I was shot myself, by that gun in the dean's briefcase."

"That was the one mistake you made, and I almost didn't catch it. As my dad and Velie and I entered the mall yesterday and hurried toward your shop, we all heard a single shot as the supposed killer fired and hit you in the side. It was Uncle Sam today, in one of his crazed statements, who told me the sound of shooting is better than the sound of silence. But it wasn't true with you. We heard the shot when we shouldn't have, because all the crimes were committed with a silenced pistol! You couldn't shoot yourself with the real murder weapon because it was already hidden among the papers in the dean's bulging briefcase. You couldn't plant it there later because you knew you'd be in the hospital. As the gun dealer told me, it's easy to buy a weapon on any street corner up here, but it's not so easy if you need a silencer. Sometime late Wednesday or early Thursday you got into the dean's office and hid the real murder weapon in his briefcase. If anyone saw you, it would have been explained as a visit to see your son Virgil in the next office. You'd previously fired a shot from the real gun into the spine of one of your books, where we'd recover it. Yesterday you pricked your finger and left a drop of your blood on that exit door, then took a second twenty-two-caliber target pistol, fired it through your dress and a roll of flesh in your side, and screamed for help. The second gun went into a secret drawer in your desk that your son mentioned to me, and the bullet that wounded you probably went into a pillow. I'd called to say we were on the way, so you fired the shot when you heard the approaching siren."

His father was shaking his head. "I can see it, Ellery, but I still can't believe it."

"Then think about this. Why would the killer wear a ski mask when he intended to kill his victim? The mask could only serve as evidence against him. Also, why were so many of the victims cus-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tomers of the mall? Why did the killer use a gun, easily linked to the killings if found, rather than a knife or other weapon? And why did the killer add Professor Androvney to the list even though he didn't frequent the mall?"

"Why, Ellery?"

"She lied about the ski mask, of course, and many of the victims after the first one were her own customers. She used the gun for two reasons: so she could stay safely out of reach of her stronger victims, and so the killings could be linked through the matching bullets. As for Androvney, he had to be killed because he was in line to be Dean of Arts and Letters, a position she wanted for her son."

Madame Beatrice started to rise from her bed. "You're a devil, damn you!"

"With Androvney dead and Dean Cracken arrested, if not convicted, in the killings, her son Virgil became a likely candidate for the position."

"She did it all for her son?"

"I think only half for her son. Cracken had been at the university for thirty-five years, remember, and she'd been telling fortunes about that long. I think Cracken was her lover all those years ago, and the father Virgil Meadler never knew he had."

"Now that's guesswork, Ellery."

"Is it, Dad? Cracken was a Dante expert, perhaps obsessed with the subject. Wouldn't he be naturally attracted to a young woman named Beatrice, the name Dante gave to his own ideal of womanhood in *The Divine Comedy?* And if their union brought forth a son, wouldn't Beatrice have named him Virgil, after the Roman poet who guided Dante through the circles of Hell?"

She was staring at them now with eyes that seemed suddenly blank. "You mean I did it all for nothing? All this planning, all these killings? For nothing?"

"Does Dean Cracken know Meadler is his son?" Ellery asked quietly.

"I never told him, but he may have suspected. He was so obsessed with Dante that I wanted it to be like this. None of the people I killed were worthwhile anyway. They all deserve their places in Dante's Hell. I deserve it too." And then she was silent.

Ellery turned to Pia Straton. "You can phone in your story now," he said.

On the way out of the hospital he came upon Virgil Meadler on his way in. "Ellery," the professor asked, "how's my mother today?"●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art by Allen Davis

The Girl in the Picture

by Hayford Peirce

The *demi-Chinoise* in the color snapshot was as beautiful a girl as I had ever seen in a long lifetime of admiring—sadly, in most cases, from all too great a distance—beautiful girls. An obvious half-Tahitian, half-Chinese, she sat in a round deck chair set against a bamboo wall, her long, bare, golden legs tucked beneath her. Glossy black hair framed an oval face and hung down over breasts that were concealed by a slinky, form-fitting dress almost the color of her skin. Her lips were half-parted, and her almond eyes gazed wistfully, almost adoringly, at the young man sitting beside her. She was, I judged, somewhere in her late teens, but I wouldn't have been surprised to learn that she was no more than sixteen or seventeen. As well as being ethereally beautiful, she also radiated total innocence.

Not only that, in some strange way she also seemed tan-

©1999 by Hayford Peirce

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

talizingly familiar. . . .

I fell instantly in love with her.

"That's some girl," I said in the rough but serviceable French I had picked up in the company of various Germans, Hungarians, and other non-Frenchmen in my years as a sergeant major in the Foreign Legion.

"Yes. That's me she's talking to."

"It is?"

I glanced at the man on the other side of my desk in dismay. *This* old geezer—*he* was the relatively good-looking young guy sitting there with Miss Galaxy? My love turned to bitter ashes. If this was true, then my inamorata had begun her reign thirty or forty years ago and was now most likely a toothless old granny who, on a relentlessly starchy diet of taro, breadfruit, and plantains, had swollen into a 300-pound Mama Ruau.

"Bien sûr, that's me!" snapped my prospective client indignantly. "You can't see the resemblance?" He peered at me suspiciously. "You are a detective, aren't you? That's what the sign says."

The sign he was referring to is epoxied to the front of the building three flights below and says, in discreet gold letters on black:

AGENCE CANEILI
INVESTIGATIONS, SÉCURITÉ
DISCRÉTION ASSURÉE

"Of course, of course," I reassured him. "The *demoiselle* in the picture is so ravishing that I simply hadn't had eyes for anyone else."

This sort of flowery garbage goes down better in French than in English, of course, and it seemed to satisfy the man across from me, whose French, in any case, was even more peculiar-sounding than mine, being of the French-Canadian persuasion and so heavily accented as to be nearly impenetrable.

"Can you find her for me?"

I just managed to keep from demanding how anyone could possibly misplace so stunning a creature and grunted noncommittally. "Just how old is this picture?"

Readers sometimes ask where an author's ideas come from. In this case, the author, like one of the characters in the story, was in possession of a photograph taken in 1961, of a girl he once knew. Hayford Peirce is fortunate in having a police inspector son-in-law (in Tahiti) and so, in real life, as in the story, he asked the detective to try to track down his one-time friend. You may be interested to know that Mr. Peirce's son-in-law has so far been unsuccessful. ¶

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Almost forty years old," he admitted reluctantly. "It was taken at the old Matavai Hotel sometime in nineteen sixty-one, back when they still had bungalows."

"It's a very clear picture—hard to believe it wasn't taken yesterday. That's a bungalow you're sitting in front of?" I tapped the glossy lines of polished bamboo in the left side of the picture.

"Yes. We were sitting outside the bungalow of one of the MGM people who were here making the *Bounty*. I was drinking Hinano beer, and she was drinking *limonade blanc.*"

"That's a pretty good memory of something thirty-seven years old."

"She was the first girl I'd ever fallen in love with. . . ."

"Yes." I examined my potential client a little more carefully. He wasn't *really* an old geezer, just a multi-chinned guy in his mid- to late-fifties who'd let his belly expand and his gray hair recede and had yellowing teeth and wore tight-fitting shorts and a flowery pareo-cloth shirt that made him look even chubbier than he was. I turned back to the photo.

The boy in the picture was probably eighteen or nineteen, and although his face was in sharp profile against a black background he had a full head of dark brown hair and a bony jaw. Even for a highly trained operative like Joe Caneili, with his advanced degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Detectology, it was impossible to say with certainty that it was really the same guy who had plunked himself down in my little office three minutes earlier. Once again I let my eyes flicker between the two. Some people do change more in thirty-five years than others. . . .

And photos *can* be deceiving. . . .

I couldn't make up my mind. Call it a tossup.

"Okay, Monsieur—"

"Duchamps, Hippolyte."

"—Duchamps, what's the name of this girl you want me to find?"

"Tara. Tara Héréhéré."

"Héréhéré?"

"Yes."

I shrugged. Maybe Duchamps was joshing me about his love goddess's name, maybe he wasn't. If I had a crusty brown baguette for every lie or piece of misinformation that my clients have told me over the years . . .

"If I *do* find her for you, then what?"

"Then what?" Clearly this was not a matter Duchamps had fully considered. "Why . . . why, you tell me where she is, or point her out to me, and I pay you, and that's it. And . . . and I go ask her if she remembers me."

I considered the round-faced French-Canadian carefully. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blinked back at me with earnest brown eyes that seemed mirrors of candor, but in my profession it's always better to be safe than sorry. "Well, I regret infinitely, Monsieur Duchamps, but there have been some unfortunate stalking incidents recently, here, and in the States, and in France, that everyone is aware of, and I really think we'd have to modify your intentions if I were to accept trying to find your friend."

Now he scowled, with bushy gray eyebrows that didn't seem to be much in evidence in the picture. "How do you mean, modify?"

"It's no big deal. If I find her, I'll take a written or oral message from you to her, or ask her if she'll meet you somewhere public. She'll say yes, you'll meet her, and I'll go to bed with a clear conscience. What could be simpler?"

Hippolyte Duchamps didn't like it, but after another couple of minutes of batting it back and forth he discovered that there really was no choice in the matter. Either he agreed to my terms or he got shown the door.

"Before I take your down payment," I said, "I'll give you three minutes' worth of free detective work."

"How do you mean?" he muttered sullenly.

"I'll look through the phone book for any Héréhérés."

"I've already done that."

"For all of the different islands?"

"Mmm, maybe not."

"See, that's why it's always wise to invest in professional help in time of need."

As it turned out, however, even a rank amateur like Hippolyte Duchamps could have done the job: There was absolutely no person of any sex whatsoever listed in any of the 112 islands of French Polynesia with the name of Héréhéré.

"All right," I sighed, "now I'll need some money, and some more information. Where are you staying?"

"The Hotel Tahara'a, the one up on the hill."

"Ah. When was the last time you actually saw this girl?"

He gestured at the picture in my hand. "Probably about July of sixty-one—I only knew her for a couple of weeks."

"And you don't know anything about her except her name?"

"I think she was born on the island of Rimatara in the Australes. Her mother was Tahitian, she said, her father Chinese. She was working as a salesgirl in a perfume store in the old Vaima block."

I nodded in resignation. Her father had probably been the owner of one of the ubiquitous Chinese general stores that were still the lifeblood of the outer islands and was now most likely dead. And the old Vaima block had been torn down twenty years

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ago. Two almost certain dead ends. "You say you met her during the filming of *Mutiny on the Bounty?*"

"Yes. Our bicycles ran into each other in town one day."

I let my eyes linger again with pleasure upon the girl in the picture. "Anyone as beautiful as this must have been in the movie."

"No. She was too Chinese-looking, they said, not Tahitian enough. This photo was taken with a flash at night and shows her Tahitian side. If you saw her in the daylight she generally looked a lot more Chinese."

I sighed audibly. Now I was looking for a gorgeous girl who also was a master of disguise. "How old was she? What would she be now?"

"I think she said she was eighteen. So that would make her fifty-five, more or less."

"Was she just a girlfriend that you dated, or did you actually live with her for a while?"

"Both. She lived at the old Hotel Moorea with me for about ten days."

"And you don't know anything more about her than what you've just told me?"

"No."

Once again I sighed. That was the old-time Tahiti for you: live with a girl for ten days and just barely manage to learn her name. Of course, as far as I knew, that was probably the new-time Tahiti also. . . .

I rose to my feet. "All right, Monsieur Duchamps, I'll do my best. I may find her this afternoon, or I may never find her. A girl as beautiful as that is probably married to the Directeur-Général of the Bank of France and living in a château on the Loire." I paused. "By the way, what were *you* doing in Tahiti when you met her? July of nineteen sixty-one was pretty old-time Tahiti. Was the jet-strip even here?"

"I was just a tourist, Monsieur Caneili, a tourist who met a beautiful girl that he's never forgotten. . . ."

I watched Hippolyte Duchamps's ample derriére waddle down the shabby concrete steps to the next landing and wondered if anything he had told me was true beyond the fact that the girl in the picture was undeniably beautiful.

For a while I pondered what to do next, then gathered up the traveler's checks that the French-Canadian had endorsed over to me. I filled out a deposit slip, made a brief telephone call, then slipped into my broad-brimmed and rather tattered plantation hat made of bleached pandanus, and ambled down to the sidewalk.

Just in front of me, on the other side of a wall of immobile traffic, was the old whitewashed colonial cathedral that used to have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an occasional small tree growing out of its tiled roof. Now, in keeping with the continuing modernization of downtown Papeete, the trees had finally been banished. I skipped lightly through the stalled cars with the insouciance that years in the Foreign Legion can give a man, past the massive doors of the stately monument to superstition, through another wedge of fuming motorists, and up the steps to the Westpac Bank. Here I made my modest deposit without eliciting overt hoots of laughter from the mostly smiling young tellers and strolled back to the glare of the midafternoon sun.

Now, I said to myself resolutely, to work.

As I walked to where I had finally found a parking space nearly a kilometer away in the automotive inferno that was daytime Papeete, I briefly reviewed my chain of reasoning.

I wanted to find (or merely even find out about) a girl who had certainly been one of the most noted lovelies on the island thirty-five years ago. Noted lovelies seldom keep their beauty entirely to themselves.

Certain men, I knew, Joe Caneili, *malheureusement,* not being among them, seemed to attract beautiful girls as effortlessly as flowers attract honeybees. Because, perhaps, they were the physical equivalency, in the eyes of women, of beautiful girls? If so, it was all a mystery to Caneili.

But I did happen to know one of the island's more celebrated beefcakes, an otherwise decent enough guy whom I occasionally ran into in bars and fishing tournaments, usually with adoring throngs of the weaker sex draped around him in breathless profusion.

Today I found Heimata Mahimana just where his office had told me he ought to be: on the work site of an elaborate cement-block home going up in the hills of Punaauia. I got out of my car and inhaled a deep breath of non-polluted air. Far below were the waving green tops of the coconut, chestnut, breadfruit, and ironwood trees that covered the narrow coastal plain between the mountains and the placid gray Pacific. And ten miles away the jagged profile of the sister island of Moorea loomed like the backbone of some fantastic dinosaur against the cloudless sky. It was good to be out of the big, bad city.

I waited until the master builder had finished discussing a set of blueprints with three of his workmen, then gestured him off to one side. As usual, Heimata flashed his mouthful of enormous white teeth at me, so shiny against the rest of his mahogany-colored face that even in daylight they appeared fluorescent. His enormous paw didn't quite mangle my hand but only because a legionnaire is prepared for any eventuality.

"You're looking a little ragged for a young man in his twenties,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I joshed him. "Why don't you take a vacation from some of those lovely ladies?"

The dazzling smile grew even wider, and I had to admit that if broad shoulders, narrow hips, bulging muscles, shoulder-length wavy black hair, and a profusion of gold chains, rings, bracelets, and anklets were your style, then Heimata Mahimana was right up your alley.

"That Caneili, always the jokester!" he rumbled happily. He thumped himself on his washboard belly with a sound like a bank vault closing. "Weren't you there for my fiftieth birthday last month? I know you were invited."

"In Bora Bora on a job." I sighed. "Is it fifty years already? Where *do* the decades go?" I reached into my shirt pocket for the picture that Hippolyte Duchamps had reluctantly left with me. "But that means you're not yet senile enough to have forgotten this beauteous creature. Cast your eyes upon this, Heimata, old friend, stir your memories just a bit, and tell me who she is."

The Tahitian glanced idly at the picture, then with mounting enthusiasm. "I don't *believe* it!" he breathed. "Caneili, is this picture really thirty years old? It *can't* be!"

"More like thirty-five."

His eyes glittered. "Then it *is* her!"

"Surely not your very first girlfriend, Heimata, the one you never forgot? That would *really* be too much of a coincidence."

"First girlfriend, no, of course not. And I *have* forgotten her name, by the way. But this one—" he waved the picture enthusiastically "—this is the one I fell in love with when I was fifteen years old! I loved her like crazy! For months and months, Caneili!"

"You did? And then?"

He waggled his great Polynesian head wonderingly. "And then—nothing! I never got *anywhere* with her! She said I was too *young* for her! She was twenty-two and I was fifteen, and I was too young!" He shook his head some more.

"Well, even the Babe struck out occasionally," I muttered, seizing the snapshot and restoring it to my pocket. "So what *was* this unforgettable girl's name?"

"Tara's? It was one of those long names like they have down in the Australes, Vanioréoré or something like that."

"It wasn't Héréhéré, then?"

"Héréhéré? Are you crazy, Caneili? That's the Tahitian word for 'love.'"

I grinned.

"That's what I thought. Someone is fooling someone else here—or was thirty-five years ago." I lowered my voice. "What was she doing when you knew her?"

"Doing? Not much, except living with old Hubert Hollmane, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

guy who used to have the first dry-cleaning business in town."

"A Frenchman?"

"Yeah, skinny old coot with a cigarette butt always stuck in the gap between his two front teeth—how could he *possibly* attract a girl like that?" But Heimata Mahimana's indignation faded and he flashed a sudden cheerful smile. "But she left him, of course, went off with some guy she'd known from the *Bounty* a couple of years before and married him. Must have broken about a million hearts, including mine all over again."

"Good grief. Was it *Brando* she married?"

"No, no, just a guy from the *boat* they brought down to make the movie, not a guy from the movie itself. A lot of the local girls married the sailors and went off with them to live in romantic old Canada."

"Canada? Tahitian girls in romantic old tropical Canada?"

"Sure. Nova Scotia, that's where they built the boat. Sailed it down here with a Canadian crew."

I removed my hat in order to scratch my head. "Well, well, what next? So this superb Tara Heartbreaker is still in Canada, then?"

Heimata Mahimana stared at me as if I had drifted away from my moorings. "Of course not! How many of those dumb Tahitian girls ever made it through the first Canadian winter, do you think? Married to a bunch of dumb sailors?" He snorted indulgently. "No, she's back, just like all the rest of them." He pursed his lips and stared thoughtfully into the distance for a moment. "Saw her a couple years ago. Still looks pretty good."

In spite of myself I could feel a tingle of excitement. "So you know where she is, then?"

"Can probably help you find her." The master builder gave his leonine head a tragic shake. "But now that I'm not too young for her, she's way too old for *me*. . . ."

Later that evening I got a call through to my client's room at the Hotel Tahara'a. "I've found her."

"What! Already?"

"It was easy," I said with feigned modesty. And actually, it *had* been easy. Heimata Beefcake had distinctly remembered from his last sighting of her that Tara Long-Australes-Name was now somehow connected with the hotel business. As a private eye of assured *discrétion,* I was in reasonably good standing with most of the local hotel managers, all of whom suffered from the usual petty crimes associated with the hotel game. The third one I talked to told me precisely where the former Tara "Héréhéré" could be found and under what name. And now I was reporting the good news to my slightly weather-beaten Canadian client.

"I'll need a little expense money," I said, "and I can stop off at the hotel on my way to town tomorrow morning to pick up any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

note you care to write—it'll save you a trip to my office."

"You still won't just tell me where she is and let me telephone her? I don't understand why you're doing this to me—do I really *look* like a monster?"

"No, of course not, and I know I'm probably being stupid, certainly old-maidish, but that's the way it's got to be."

"So you can sleep soundly at night," he sneered bitingly.

"My sleep is very important to me."

"It's my legionnaire!"

I blinked my eyes in the cool, dark interior of the driftwood, bamboo, and coconut-thatch boutique that was a welcome oasis in the blinding dazzle of the sun-drenched atoll of Tetiaroa. A middle-aged Island woman who was taller than average and still reasonably slim glided out from behind a coconut-plank counter and, to my astonishment, wrapped her pareo-clothed body around mine. For a long moment I gaped foolishly at the glossy black hair rubbing against my cheek. *"You're* Tara? Tara Héréhéré? Tara Vairoaroaraa?"

The Chinese-Tahitian face turned up to mine, looking distinctly more Tahitian than Chinese. "Not Héréhéré," she giggled, "that's just a joke name. But I'm certainly Tara Vairoaroaraa. And you—" she squeezed me affectionately, "—you're my favorite legionnaire!"

But even the most battle-hardened legionnaire is entitled to an occasional time-out to recover his élan. I eased away from my long-lost friend, pulled my broad-brimmed hat from my brow, and scratched my forehead as if that actually aided the thinking process. "But you looked *Chinese* when I knew you," I finally protested weakly. "And your name was Hélène. I may be dumb, in fact, we *know* I'm dumb, but even I would have remembered you if your name had been Tara."

Tara flicked an airy gesture of dismissal. "Oh, that was just something that Tahitian girls all did when I was growing up, adopt some French name or other to replace our Tahitian names. We thought it made us exotic and sophisticated. The one I chose was Hélène."

I sighed deeply. "And when I knew you, you were still using it."

"Only as a *nom de guerre."* She giggled again. "When I went out dancing and needed rescuing by legionnaires."

"From other legionnaires." I glanced around the dim hotel boutique, empty of humanity except for us, at its stock of pareo cloths and shirts, girly calendars, bottles of suntan lotion, French wines and perfumes, carved war-clubs from the Marquesas Islands, polished shells, and all the other junk you could find in fifty similar shops scattered across French Polynesia. "Looks like you could shut down for a moment while we go have a *limonade* or a beer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and catch up on our news. This *is* your shop, isn't it?"

"Yes. *Le patron* lets me have it rent-free—I'm an old friend of a friend of his." Tara moved gracefully to the shop's glass door, pushed me through, and led me through a few yards of bright sunlight into the relative dimness of the hotel's dining room-lobby. At ten in the morning, a few stragglers were still finishing their breakfasts under the round, coconut-thatched roof while three barefooted Tahitian waitresses in pareos had begun a lethargic cleaning-up. "Let's go sit out by the bar," suggested Tara, "they want to close up in here."

A few minutes later we were sprawled in deck chairs in the shade of a thick clump of banana plants, waiting for coffee to arrive. A distant whine grew suddenly louder—much louder—and I looked up to see the small twin-engined plane that had brought me to Tetiaroa climbing into the deep blue sky only a few dozen yards away. Conversation was impossible until it had dwindled into the distance on its way back to Papeete. The flight was only about fifteen minutes, and I hoped that the young Tahitian pilot would remember that he had another paying passenger for his three o'clock run—I'd been the only passenger on the morning flight and, as far as I could tell, upon my arrival only three hotel guests had ambled from the lobby to the doors of the waiting plane. Business seemed far from brisk on the island hideaway of Tahiti's most famous resident, and I asked myself how long an ordinary hotel owner could have stayed open in similar circumstances.

Our coffee arrived, and as I stirred my own I wondered how to bring up the reason for my visit. Having the elusive Tara Héréhéré, a.k.a. Tara Vairoaroaraa, suddenly turn into the woman I had once fancifully called Hélène de Troie had shaken me slightly. "There were a couple of big whales in the water just off the reef when we flew in," I temporized. "The pilot wanted to see them too, so he flew us around a couple of times just about upside down."

"I wondered what he was up to—normally I don't even hear the plane until it lands and pulls up right beside the shop." She raised her coffee cup and clinked it against mine. "Good to see you again, *mon légionnaire*. Are you here as a tourist? Or as a detective? You're sort of famous, you know, Tahiti's only private detective. . . ."

"I think I've got some Chinese competition now, but that's okay with me—I don't speak Chinese."

"Just legionnaire French." She smiled, and I surmised that she was thinking of that Saturday evening ten or eleven years ago at the Hotel Tahiti when I'd rescued her from the enthusiastic but unwanted attentions of a trio of drunken legionnaires who were boisterously celebrating the annual commemoration of the Legion's glorious military defeat at Bir-Hakeim forty years before in the North African desert. All four of us were wearing our best

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dress whites and stiff-brimmed kepis, and even though I had been mustered out a few years before, I found that I could still effortlessly summon up my parade-ground sergeant major's voice, as well as a few colorful phrases in various Eastern European languages. After a few uneasy moments in which I wondered just how much physical damage I could sustain from three angry legionnaires, the trio had snapped to attention, saluted raggedly, and lurched off in search of more acquiescent companionship.

I turned to the good-looking damsel I had just rescued from the fire-breathing dragons. She was wearing something very tight-fitting made of shiny green silk decorated with lots of golden dragons. It had slits on both sides that ran nearly to her waist. Her hair was pulled back into an intricate bun and her high cheekbones and almond eyes glittered in the flickering light of the garden's kerosene tiki torches. To my relatively inexperienced but still appreciative eye she seemed about ninety-five percent Chinese and five percent Tahitian.

She smiled. "I'm called Hélène," she said, and I found that I had made a friend for life.

Or at least for the rest of the weekend, until early Monday morning, when she vanished from my existence as suddenly as she had entered it.

My Helen of Troy. I'd looked for her at the next ten Bals de Bir-Hakeim but never saw her again.

Until now—as the successfully unearthed quarry of my French-Canadian client.

Finally, I could see no easy way around it. I removed the photo from my shirt pocket but kept it screened from Tara's view. "There's a feller who's hired me to find you," I said. "Says he knew you once a long time ago. I've got a written message from him to give to you."

Her eyes lit up in wonder. "You've been hired to find *me?*"

"Yes." I handed her the picture. "Here's the guy—and you, a certain number of years ago. Looking almost as gorgeous as you do today."

But Tara's eyes had grown even rounder as she gasped in surprise. "Your client says he's the man in this picture?"

"Yes. But it's hard to tell—maybe he is, maybe he isn't."

Tara's lips tightened angrily. "Well, he certainly *isn't!*"

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure!" She waved the picture under my nose. "I ought to know my own dead husband, hadn't I?"

That called for another pot of coffee and while we drank it she told me about meeting André Machette, a Nova Scotian sailor who was crewing on *H.M.S. Bounty* in 1960 and '61, following him back to Halifax a few years later, and marrying him. From there they'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moved to French-speaking Trois-Rivières, in the province of Québec. Here, while her husband made a modest living from the small boatyard he'd started, Tara Machette had given birth to two boys.

"We were reasonably happy," she said, "not a lot of money, but enough, and the children were wonderful. Both of them grew up around boats, so the older one joined the Canadian Navy just as soon as he could. That . . . that was just before my husband died."

I thought of the undeniably alive French-Canadian calling himself Hippolyte Duchamps and wondered what sort of can of worms I had just gotten myself into. "How did he die?"

"He loved to go fishing. Every fall he and a couple of friends would take a canoe and go into the back country and paddle and fish and camp for two weeks. Then one year his two friends suddenly couldn't make it, so he decided to go by himself. He really *was* a wonderful sailor, you know. So he went by himself up to Lac Barriére and on the fourth or fifth day a terrible storm came up and two or three days later they found his empty canoe drifting upside down. But not André. . . ."

"He was never . . . recovered?"

The middle-aged Chinese-Tahitian woman shook her head. By now the second pot of coffee had stretched out into a leisurely lunch and Tara had recovered most of her earlier self-assurance. "No. It took *years* to get him declared officially dead. By that time my other son had joined the navy too, and there wasn't any reason for me to stay in Canada and freeze to death, so I came back to Tahiti—and met my legionnaire."

I grinned, but persevered. "And you're *sure* your late husband is dead?"

"Well, of course! Wait here." She darted away from her chair and returned a few minutes later with a thin, beige-colored booklet that she tossed on the table before me. It was, I saw, a *Livret de Famille,* or Family Booklet, which is delivered by the French government to married couples and officially records births and deaths and marriages and divorces of all subsequent members of the family. "Look," she said, turning the pages. "Here's André—and the date of his death. You *know* how the French are about their *Livrets de Famille*—there's no way in the world they'd ever say he was dead unless he really was."

I nodded. The French did indeed take their *Livrets de Famille* very seriously.

Tara studied the photo once again—she hadn't yet read the sealed envelope I'd brought from Hippolyte Duchamps—then shrugged. "Anyway, even if he *was* still alive, he's been out of my life for thirteen years now—it's not as if I was still in love with him." She reached across to catch two of my fingers and to toy with them idly. "What do *you* think I should do?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"First, read the note he sent."

"All right." She tore open the envelope, glanced at the page within, and snorted derisively. "'We've got to talk,' it says. That's all."

"Is it your husband's handwriting?"

"It's been a long time. I just don't remember. . . ."

"Would you like *me* to talk to him about all this? Find out what he says?" It wouldn't be as if I were betraying my client—after all, it was now clear that he had in *some* way lied to me, even if I wasn't yet sure about the particulars.

"*Would* you?"

"Sure—curiosity is my greatest fault. Could you come over to meet him if I thought it was safe—and desirable?"

Tara ran a finger along her still shapely chin as she considered. "In two or three days, yes. I can't just walk away from the shop. . . ."

"All right. I'll call you as soon as I have any news."

A distant drone was gradually growing louder. "That sounds like the plane to take me back." Tara accompanied me back to the shade of the coconut trees that framed the atoll's tiny crushed-coral landing strip. An even smaller plane than the one that had brought me stood at the end of the strip. A lanky Frenchman in a blue work smock was peering under the cowling of its single engine.

"Ah," said Tara, "Marlon must be going to town."

"I didn't think he ever went to town—except to fly to the States." The atoll's owner was notoriously reclusive.

"Oh, occasionally to see a dentist, stuff like that. But not very often."

A moment later we watched the two-engined plane that served the hotel bounce onto the coral strip and rumble towards us. Shortly afterwards I and two other passengers were being pulled into the blue skies of Tetiaroa. For a while, far below, I could see Tara waving.

Polynesians are early risers, particularly in the outer islands, so most of them are also early sleepers. I called Tara at a quarter to ten that evening. "Yes?" Her voice sounded hoarse, as if she had just been pulled from sleep.

"Sorry to wake you. Just wanted to say that I haven't been able to get hold of this guy who calls himself Hippolyte Duchamps. He must be out on the town. I'll get him tomorrow."

"Thank you, *mon légionnaire,* I do appreciate it."

But the next day was more of the same. Impossible to reach the French-Canadian by telephone. After listening to the phone ring endlessly in his room at the Hotel Tahara'a for the umpteenth time, I beat my way through the merciless downtown traffic, across the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bedroom districts of Pirae and Arue, and eventually, twenty-five minutes later, found myself in the parking lot of my client's hotel.

The Tahara'a had been built by Americans thirty years earlier on One Tree Hill, a majestic point of rocky cliffs thrusting into Matavai Bay, where Captains Cook and Bligh had weighed anchor two centuries earlier. It was an impressive architectural achievement, with a couple of large buildings with concave roofs vaguely shaped like Polynesian longhouses at the tip of the point, and below them the eight floors or so of bedrooms that marched down the cliffs like enormous staircases. It was by far the most spectacular location for a hotel on the island and yet it had only enjoyed moderate success over the years. Right now it was under its fourth or fifth owner and, from outward appearances, didn't seem to be attracting many more clients than Brando's hotel on Tetiaroa.

For a few minutes I wandered through the lush vegetation that had grown up around the main buildings and water park, admiring the spectacular views that the site offered of Matavai Bay and Point Venus to one side, and of Papeete and the sister island of Moorea on the other. And of the smooth gray Pacific lapping the rocks far below, and of the great green and blue mountains of the island's interior behind me. Then I made for the offices off the main lobby and started the day's serious work.

Half an hour later I was back in the parking lot, no closer to finding my suddenly elusive client than when I had first driven in. I *did* know that the name on the Canadian passport he'd shown at the front desk upon checking in was the same as what he'd given me, Hippolyte Duchamps, so whether he was also André Machette or not, at least his present alias wasn't a spur-of-the-moment improvisation.

I'd also learned that his bed hadn't been slept in the night before and that no one in the hotel had any memory of seeing him since the morning before. My friend, the assistant manager, who had supplied this meager information, also gave me a knowing Polynesian grin. "He's off somewhere with a *vahiné* and will show up later today with a hangover and a hole in his wallet. Isn't that what they come to Tahiti for?"

Once again I telephoned Tara Vairoaroaraa on Tetiaroa.

"How very strange," she said in a tight voice.

"I'm *sure* he didn't follow me to the airport when I flew over yesterday. But just in case he somehow managed to find out where you are, are you certain he hasn't turned up over there?"

"Of course. The plane only comes in twice a day, and I can see everyone who gets off. The only boats are the hotel supply boats once a week or so. He couldn't have *swum* over!"

"Hrmph." I looked out my office window at the nearby cathedral.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nothing I saw there lent wings to my thoughts. "Well, he did tell me he was going to be here for a couple of weeks, so I guess we have all the time in the world. . . ."

And I had, after all, been more or less fully paid in advance, so what did I care if I never saw him again?

All the time in the world . . .

The next morning I read a late bulletin in the local newspaper about the body of a Canadian tourist being found wedged in the rocks at the base of the Hotel Tahara'a. He had apparently been in the water for some time before the surf had deposited him where three Tahitian fishermen had found him the evening before. The name of the tragically deceased was being withheld by the authorities until the next of kin were notified.

Old Joe Caneili didn't have to get out his crystal ball to divine the name they had found on his passport. I did wonder, however, just what they would learn about his next of kin. . . .

As the morning plane to Tetiaroa hummed smoothly along a few thousand feet above the almost motionless Pacific, I turned in my seat beside the pilot to watch another tiny plane moving directly towards us off to the right. "*Monsieur la vedette,*" grunted the pilot, meaning, more or less, "Mister Movie Star" in the language I had grown up speaking in Bookbinder, Kansas.

"You must see him a lot."

"Not since he got his own plane. Now *nobody* sees him except a couple of people on his island. That's the way he seems to want it."

I found Tara in the still-empty boutique and wondered how she managed to eke a living out of her shop even if the kindly *patron* did let her have it rent-free. She was wearing her usual work costume of a red and white pareo that draped nicely from her high bosom. A large yellow hibiscus was in her straight black hair and she smelled pleasantly of *monoi,* the distinctive local perfume. But her eyelids were swollen and her face seemed taut and strained, far more gaunt and Chinese-appearing than a few days before.

"Let's go have some coffee," I suggested. Or maybe even a double brandy, I added under my breath.

"Did you see this morning's paper?" I asked when we had pulled our chairs into the dappled shadows.

"No. They arrive with the plane—they haven't been brought to the shop yet."

"I thought that might be the case. Here." I handed her the clipping I'd made from *Le Journal de Tahiti.*

Tara's hand flew to her lips and she gasped audibly as she scanned the item. Finally her hand dropped limply to the table

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and she stared at me blankly. "He's *dead?* He really is?"

"Yes." I had, in fact, made a call to someone I knew at the *gendarmerie* to confirm that it really had been the body of Hippolyte Duchamps. "So I guess we'll never know who he was, or what he wanted."

Tara shook her head back and forth in shocked bewilderment, and when she finally raised her eyes to mine it was difficult to see in her drawn features the carefree beauty of the girl in the picture. "You won't say anything to them about him wanting to see me?" she whispered.

"Why should I? And why would anyone even ask?" I took a healthy swallow of the Hinano beer I had ordered to go with my coffee.

"I suppose you're right. Do you still have that picture you showed me of . . . us?"

I pulled it from my pocket and passed it across. Tara stared at it expressionlessly for a moment, then tore it into neat little shreds that she scattered to the wind. I nodded and said nothing.

We sat for another ten minutes finishing our coffee and beer without exchanging another word, each thinking our own thoughts. Finally I tossed some money on the table. "I think if I hurry I can catch the flight back," I said as I began to pull myself to my feet.

"Wait!" Tara reached across to grasp me by the wrist. Without looking at me she murmured, "You helped me once before when I needed it. Can you do it again?"

"Sure. For what it's worth."

She darted a furtive glance at two other guests lolling in the sun a good dozen yards away, as well as at the small coconut-thatched bar shack, now empty of barmen, and pulled her chair next to mine. "What do you call it when you . . . when you tell someone something that *might* have happened, but didn't *really* happen? You know, just so you can talk about it, even though it isn't real. . . ."

It took awhile to get my brain back in gear, but finally I offered, rather tentatively: "Hypothetical question, maybe?"

Tara uttered a tiny sigh of relief, as if we had already made enormous progress towards some distant goal. "That's it, that's just what I was trying to say!"

"You have a hypothetical question, then?"

"Yes." For a while the woman with whom I had once spent a very pleasant weekend a dozen years before seemed to wonder what to say next, then suddenly began talking rapidly, almost nonstop. "Well, here's the question, then. Suppose someone told you, just *supposing*, remember, that . . . that after a certain person was over here a couple of days ago talking to another certain person, that the certain person over here watched the other one fly away, back to Tahiti. . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right, I can suppose that pretty easily," I encouraged her. "Then what did that certain person, the one who was left on Tetiaroa, do?"

"Well, she . . . that certain person, I mean, she watched him fly away, then her friend, the one who was also a friend of *le patron,* came into her shop and asked her to fly to Papeete with him. He was going to see a couple of lawyers and *notaires* about something really important and wanted me to drive him around since he doesn't drive himself. Normally *le patron's* pilot would do it, but that day the pilot had to stay at the airport to see about a part for the plane. And you know what traffic and parking can be like in town. . . ."

"Yes indeed." They were, in fact, the bane of my existence. "So you flew over to Papeete on *le patron's* plane not long after I'd returned to Tahiti?"

"Well, that certain per—"

"Yes, yes," I interrupted impatiently, "we're still talking about this hypothetical situation, but let's just make it easier for both of us to talk, okay?"

Tara nodded. "Well, we got a car at the airport and I drove him into town and dropped him off at the notary's office and was just about to go try to park the car somewhere when he came back out with two notaries and said that they were going to meet someone from the States up at the Hotel Tahara'a. So I drove them all up to the Tahara'a, and my friend said it would take at least a couple of hours and I should go have a drink or something to eat out at the water park."

I nodded in horrified fascination, not really wanting to hear what came next, but unable to keep myself from listening.

"So I walked out to the water park and got a Coke and some *poisson cru* and ate them and wandered around the pools for a while, just looking at the people, when suddenly someone said, 'Tara?' and I turned around and there *he* was."

I didn't have to ask whom she meant by *he.* "And was it *really* the long-lost husband, the one who is legally dead?"

"Oh, yes," she breathed, "absolutely. I saw it at once. Even though he was fatter, and a *lot* older-looking, it was him, all right."

"André Machette. If we were actually talking about real people, of course. . . ."

Tara managed a faintly conspiratorial twist to her lips. "Yes. Anyway, I didn't really want to talk to him; here was the man who'd already ruined my life once by dying on me, and now here he was *again!* But he grabbed me by the arm and pulled me away from the water park and through some of the trees and stuff and out to one of the benches by the edge of the cliffs."

Once again I nodded. From what I understood was going on with liability claims back in the States, no hotel in the country

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would have dared put a bench in such a spot in a million years. Not without three sets of railings and fences, warning signs, spotlights, security officers, and God knows what else. Maybe an ever-present lawyer to hand out quitclaim forms. . . .

Here in Tahiti, though, the philosophy was still: Fall off the cliff, buddy? It's your own damn fault. If you're nice about it, though, maybe we won't charge you for your room while you're in the hospital. . . . "So what did this guy tell you when you got out to the bench?"

Tara looked down at her hands. "Well, first he said all kinds of stuff about how great I looked and how much he'd missed me and how sorry he was it had taken him all these years after his boating accident to get his memory back and—"

"Wait! He said he'd lost his *memory?* And you *believed* this?"

Tara looked up with an unmistakable glitter to her eye. "Of *course* I didn't believe him! He'd always been a liar before, and he was still a liar now. And I told him so!"

"Well, good for you. And then what did he say?"

"What might have been the truth, but probably wasn't—he was always a guy who liked to lie just for the pleasure of it. Anyway, he sort of looked away from me and said that even though he'd always loved me, he'd once met another woman who was like a witch who'd cast a spell on him and he couldn't live without her. She worked in the Registry of Motor Vehicles or some place like that in Québec City, where it was easy to manufacture phony ID's, and they invented another name for him and a whole other life. And they also took out a lot of life insurance on him under his real name."

"With the benefits going to her? Hmmm, that's a pretty tricky ploy—insurance companies weren't born yesterday."

"That's what he *said* they did—that *she* did. In any case, he had his accident, she collected the money, and he went to live with her, all because she'd enchanted him."

"And then what happened? The spell suddenly wore off?"

"She died a little while ago. And all the money was gone. And he didn't have a business anymore. And now he's sick and needs an operation. And he's still in love with me. And the spell is broken. And he saw a picture of me in a magazine article about the hotel and recognized me. And now he wants to come live with me in Tahiti and marry me—again!"

I doubt if my mouth literally fell open as I listened to all this, for legionnaires are trained to keep their mouths firmly shut no matter how preposterous the circumstances. But I sure *felt* as if my mouth should be hanging open. "This guy. . . this André Machette that you'd been in love with and married to actually *told* you all this? Fifteen years after he'd abandoned you and your children?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now Tara looked at me with the same wide-eyed innocence of the girl in the picture. "Do you think I could make this *up?"*

"No, of course not. No one could make up anything as ridiculous as this." I reached over and took her hands in mine. "And then what happened?"

"Well, by now that . . . that *man* and I were standing up, and when he told me that he wanted me to marry him again and he moved closer and put his hand around my arm and hurt me, and then tried to kiss me, I could see all his awful teeth and I just *hated* him! And I guess that I just sort of reached out and hit him in the face and then pushed him on the shoulders, and he sort of stumbled backwards through some bushes and I ran back to the water park and . . . and . . ."

Tara shrugged helplessly. "And that's *all!* And then I went back to the car and waited for my friend and then drove back to the airport and got on the plane and went home."

As a dramatic ending, it seemed distinctly anticlimactic to the act of pushing your supposedly dead husband off a cliff. I considered my next words very carefully. "So when I called later that same evening to say I couldn't find my client, as far as you were concerned that client was just someone who'd fallen into the bushes, pulled himself out, and probably gone out for dinner?"

"Yes. I was still dreadfully upset when you called, of course, but just because of meeting him in the first place."

"Not because you knew he'd fallen down the cliff and into the ocean?"

"No! Of course not!" Tara wrung the fingers of my right hand mercilessly. "Even if . . . even if . . ."

"Even if he deserved it?" I finished for her. I looked at her grimly. "Well, as far as I'm concerned, he *did."*

"You think so?" she said in a tiny voice. "So what do you think that . . . that certain person should do now?"

I extricated one hand to waggle a finger at a passing waitress for two beers. "Nothing at all," I said firmly. "Except the next time you come to town on an errand for *le patron,* give me a call in advance and I'll see if I can remember how to do the legionnaire two-step. . . ." ●

NOTE TO READERS: *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* is now on the Web! In addition to excerpts of upcoming fiction, our page provides a short history of the magazine and a list of *EQMM*'s many awards. We share the site with *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and *Mystery Scene Magazine,* and links have already been established with several other mystery pages. It's *the* web site for mystery fans: Don't miss it! Visit us at http://www.mysterypages.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CAT THIEF

by Ernest Dudley

Londoner Ernest Dudley is a newcomer to *EQMM*. "Cat Thief" was originally published in the U.K., under the title "The White Mog," for a collection of stories by the Crime Writers Association. It then saw further life in a collection of church-related stories in the U.K. We're happy to say that its third life is its first in the U.S.— may it have at least six lives more.

First time Fred Ellis saw the white cat, it was only for a few seconds, then it was gone. Like a ghost, you might say, it being so white and all. He saw it through the railings of the garden in the square. Obviously, it had come from one of the houses in the square. But even though it had only been this brief flash, the white cat made him catch his breath—he could feel himself drooling at the thought of grabbing it and shoving it in his sack. He reckoned Bernie ought to cough up twice as much as usual for fur like this one.

He'd been smart enough to check the time by his watch when he'd seen it. Just gone ten o'clock. Next night, he'd be there, same time. He knew from experience people mostly put their cats out about the same time every night.

It was a late summer night, and Fred Ellis had been on his usual prowl. He was a cat thief. He averaged seven to ten cats a week, at up to fifty pounds a time, cash, no questions asked by a certain Bernie Hollins, who ran a furrier's behind Paddington Station as a cover for his activities. . . . His vivisectionist clients looked down their noses at thin, scraggy specimens, and your fur dealers, too, go for a healthy cat with a good amount of well-kept fur. Though it was your regular vivisectionists who were your most regular customer. Needed all the cats you could throw at them, they did. Never-ending, the demand is, with vivisectionists. But take the fur business, well, it had its ups and downs.

Fred made his cat-prowl nearly every night, covering in his travels every part of London—sometimes, if he had a hunch, he'd nip out to the suburbs, like Croydon, Wimbledon, or Streatham, in his little van. This is all the gear you need for this job. A little van, as

©1999 by Ernest Dudley

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inconspicuous as you could make it, and a strong sack or two, into which you shoved the mogs. So long as they had enough air to breathe, they were okay. They might yowl and fight sometimes, but that didn't matter, so long as you brought 'em back alive. Bernie Hollins needed a dead cat like he needed a hole in the head.

But this white mog he'd spotted in this square just off Gloucester Place, it was a real beaut. Your better-class area usually supplied your better-class cat, so he was there all right, next time. He had a specially large sack with him for the white cat. And suddenly, there it was. In the light of one of the street lamps, it looked a gleaming, brilliant white. Made your eyes pop, it was that white, and it even looked bigger than the first time. It was then he had the funny feeling it was expecting him. But, as before, it was there for only a few moments before it vanished into the shadows.

He cursed to himself. He wondered what had made it take off like that. Then it reappeared a few yards further along the railings. It was a misty night, so perhaps because of the mist, it hadn't seen Fred. He approached it cautiously, his sack gripped tight in his left hand, held partly behind his back. He rounded the corner of the garden, and still it hadn't moved. Something told Fred his luck was going to be in. Stealthily he went forward, his rubber-soled shoes making no sound.

The cat saw him. But it didn't make off. It stood there, its thick, furry tail flicking to and fro. Its eyes glowed greenish gold. Fred could almost make himself believe it was purring. He was only a couple of yards away—this was the moment to pounce. But the cat turned and proceeded alongside the railings. Fred muttered a curse and followed. He meant to nab the thing tonight, and no blinkin' error. He could feel his heart starting to race and his mouth went dry.

Once more, it stopped. It glanced back at him, those wonderful eyes aglow in the beautiful white head. Fred kept going, still cautiously. Once again, he was a couple of yards from it. And again it moved on. Fred began to think it was playing some sort of follow-my-leader game with him. Well, he'd put a stop to that. His eyes slitted angrily, his mouth became a thin line. He wasn't going to allow some bloody cat to make a bloody fool out of him—But not to panic, relax—take it slow and easy.

"Hello, white cat," he said softly. "Come on, white moggy, we're pals, ain't we?"

Its pinkish-white ears twitched, then it turned and went on. Sometimes it seemed to merge into the mist. Fred kept after it without hurrying, calling to it in a soft, persuasive voice. "Come on, whitey—come on now, let's be friends."

So it went for about forty yards, till the gardens came to an end. Now, the white cat paused, then turned down a narrow cul-de-sac,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which sloped to a small row of garages. Fred followed. It looked as if it was going to play right into his hands—if he could only get it into a corner, it was his.

His face under his cap was pale, strained with concentration. He was gritting his teeth as he followed the cat.

Halfway down the incline, it paused. It looked over its shoulder at Fred. Its eyes glowed with a greater intensity than ever. Fred drew nearer, talking cajolingly.

He saw that the half-door of the end garage to his left was slightly ajar. Then he realised the white mog was making for it. His heart leapt; he could have laughed out loud with triumph. Couldn't be better, the cat was running straight into a trap. Once inside the garage, it would be cornered and at Fred's mercy. He guessed the garage was empty, there wouldn't be a car in there, or the doors wouldn't be left open. It was empty, sure enough.

He followed the cat more quickly.

Yes, it was going into the garage—!

He stopped to watch the white cat slip inside the slightly open door, then he dashed forward. As he'd expected, the garage was empty, no car the cat could shelter under. He was slamming the door behind him, groping for his torch in his pocket, which he always carried. . . .

Then he froze.

Dozens of pairs of cats' eyes glowed at him from the darkness. The garage was alive with the white ghostly shapes of cats, their eyes, greenish gold, blazing at him, Fred's whole body crawled with terror; he gulped with horror and turned away.

But before he could get out, the eyes sprang at him. He let out a frightful scream as the claws ripped and tore him to pieces. Yowling and spitting with venom, dozens of cats slashed claws at his face, tore at his neck . . .

At that moment, two cops who'd been on duty at a nearby embassy passed the top of the cul-de-sac. Fred's agonised shrieks reached them and they dashed to the garage. One pulled the door open, the other following him. Their torches blazed and one of them switched on the light.

In its glare, Fred Ellis lay sprawled on the floor, one hand grasping the sack, the other flung out as if to protect his face, contorted in a grimace of horror. One of the cops bent and felt his pulse, listened to his heart. He looked up, shaking his head. Fred was dead.

"What in hell was all that about?" the other asked.

The cop who'd checked Fred's heart shrugged and glanced around the empty garage. "Must have had a heart attack—or something—"

He glanced again at the dead man. There wasn't a mark on him. Not a sign of cats' claws slashing and tearing Fred's face to pieces.

Not a mark. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

by Ellery Queen

Locked rooms, dying messages, impossible crimes: the early Queen novels abound with them. By the time Ellery discovered Wrightsville, the type of case he preferred had changed. So had his feelings about murder. In "The Three Widows" (p.7) Ellery is said to be an "epicure" when it comes to murder, while in this tale it leaves a bitter taste. Here is the shift from Ellery the "thinking machine" to a man of heart. But the case does contain a dying message! ✝

In spite of his passion for Wrightsville, hardly a visit of Ellery's does not turn up some major crime, as if in savage welcome to his gifts. Compelled to use them against the objects of his affection, he yet goes back, again and again and again, hopefully turning the other cheek. It is no reward for his devotion.

On this occasion he was beguiled by the season. The magnolias were in their improbable New England bloom, the syringa enriched the town with outcroppings of gold, the grass in Memorial Park stretched in greenest innocence, the ancient maples along State Street were in their infant leaf. It was simply not a day for death.

Or so Ellery told himself.

He cut across the Square (which is round), passed the Town Hall and the American Legion Bandstand, and turned into the alley of the County Court House Building, whose downstairs west wing houses the Wrightsville Police Department.

"I'm doddering," Chief Anselm Newby said, pumping Ellery's hand. "When you called from the Hollis to ask me to supper, I clean forgot about Mr. B.'s anniversary blowout. So I phoned him and he said, 'Sure, bring Mr. Queen along.' I hope you don't mind, Ellery."

It appeared that Ellery did not mind; to the contrary. Ernst Bauenfel was one of the few prominent Wrightsvillians whose path had never happened to intersect his, even though he kept running across the name in the news and advertising columns of the *Wrightsville Record,* to which he was a mail subscriber.

As the town reckoned such things, Bauenfel was a newcomer to the community. But what he lacked in local ancestry he more than made up by good works. As one of the leading merchants of High

©1967 by Ellery Queen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Village—he was a jeweler, with branches strewn about the state—Bauenfel's was to Wright County what Cartier's is to Fifth Avenue. He was a past president of the Chamber of Commerce, he held high office in most of the benevolent societies, he had twice been elected to the Board of Selectmen, he was regularly asked to take charge of the Red Cross, Community Chest, and other important drives, and his private benefactions had earned him the title of "Mr. Bountiful," which the *Record* abbreviated to Mr. B. It was said that no one ever came to Mr. B. in genuine need and went away empty-handed.

"From all I read about him," Ellery said as Chief Newby drove him up toward Hill Drive, "he's the nearest thing to a civic saint that Wrightsville's ever had."

"There isn't a living soul in Low Village or High," the police chief said, "who doesn't swear by him."

"Aren't you forgetting some juicy rumors a year ago, Anse?"

"You mean when he remarried?" Newby grunted. "You know small towns. They even talked when he got married the first time. Hester, his first wife, was a lot younger than Mr. B.—she was twenty-five when she gave birth to Amy, their only child, and Ernst was more than double that, fifty-five—and it made a lot of tongues go clickety-clack in the ladies' auxiliaries, especially since Hester was a Dade, and you know how far back the Dades go in this town. But the gabble soon died out, and there wasn't another unkind word said about Mr. B. until last year, after Hester died in that auto smashup. I mean, when he married Zelda Brown, Al Brown's youngest—the ice-cream parlor Brown—less than a month after Hester's funeral."

"What was the scoop?" Ellery asked in his nosiest Wrightsville tone. "The *Record* was annoyingly tactful."

"Well, for one thing, Zelda was Mr. B.'s secretary-bookkeeper in his Wrightsville branch store; they were together a lot. And Zelda's pretty sexy-looking. So as soon as Mr. B. married her the ladies began whispering that they'd been having an affair behind Hester's back. The damn flapmouths! I know Mr. B., and in my book he's as straight as they come. Of course, the short time between Hester's death and Ernst's remarrying helped the gossip along—"

"Some men are born for marriage," said Ellery, with the authority of one who was not.

"—but it wasn't only that. Ernst pulled the boner, or maybe in the excitement he just forgot, of marrying Zelda on what would have been Hester's birthday."

"The most generous of men," the sage pointed out, "is often the least tactful."

"Anyway, Ellery, that's ancient history. The biddies haven't found a thing to rip Zelda up the back for in the year she and Ernst have been hitched. She's raising Hester's kid—Amy is five now—as if she were her own flesh and blood, and that sort of thing goes a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

long way in this town. They're good people, Ellery. You'll like 'em."

As, indeed, Ellery did. He liked everything about the Bauenfels, from their chalet-type house with its squared-timber construction and steeply projecting eaves (evidently built by Mr. B. in an early nostalgia for his native Switzerland, to what must have been the astonishment of its Colonial neighbors on Hill Drive) to the solid *bürgerstand* furnishings of the interior.

They were simple, hearty folk, like a peasant soup. Mr. B. was portly and florid, with a gray Teutonic brush and eyes with a malty sparkle; he wore a brocaded vest festooned with a heavy gold watch chain; and Ellery thought he needed only a tray and a white apron tied around his girth to step into a *Züricher* beer garden. As for Zelda Bauenfel, nee Brown, Ellery almost failed to recognize her. He had last seen Zelda as a nubile teenager working after-school hours in her father's ice-cream emporium on Lower Main. Now she was a well-fleshed, handsome *hausfrau* in a struggling girdle, cheerful and authoritative and obviously well-loved.

It took no seer, either, to divine the affection between Zelda and her husband's first wife's child. At the approach of the stranger, little Amy clung to her stepmother's skirt, her pale Dade eyes enormous. Zelda briskly soothed her, Ellery went to work on her, and in a few minutes the child was on his lap.

"We used to love you," Amy lisped.

"Really, Amy?" Ellery said. "When was that?"

"When my mommy was bery young."

"And that, young lady," said Zelda, pink as a geranium, "is the last time I'm ever going to tell you any of my girlish secrets! Kiss Mr. Queen and Chief Newby and your papa good night, and off to bed."

"I ought to feel jealous, Mr. Queen," chuckled Ernst Bauenfel as his wife took the little girl upstairs. "That is a secret my Zelda never confided in *me.*" He had a slight German accent.

"Or me, worse luck."

"But I am not a jealous man; it is one of the things for which I thank God. Too many waste their lives envying and hating. And I am being a Saturday-night philosopher! I think that is our other guests—excuse me." And Mr. B. hastily went to the front door.

"I told you," Newby laughed.

"I'm glad I came, Anse." But Ellery's gladness was within a half hour of destruction.

The three other guests were men also. At first Ellery suspected that the absence of ladies might be significant. But it turned out that Franklin Lang was a bachelor, Rob Packard was a widower, and Martin Overbrook's wife was entertaining an uninvited spring virus and had insisted on her husband not disappointing the Bauenfels on their anniversary party.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of the three, Ellery had met only Lang. A tall weedy man with an occupational tic under his eye and bottle-fed veins in his nose, Lang was managing editor of the *Record;* Ellery's visits to Wrightsville, which the *Record* considered news, had brought them into contact from time to time. The newspaperman had always struck Ellery as rather indrawn. There was nothing indrawn about Franklin Lang this evening. He punched Mr. B.'s heavy shoulder and then threw a long arm around it.

Ellery knew Rob Packard by hearsay. He was a one-time real estate broker who had blossomed overnight into a general building contractor and had actually succeeded in supplanting that hardy Wrightsville perennial, J. C. Pettigrew, as chairman of the town's Realty Board. Packard was a red-haired man in an Italian silk suit and a bow tie, with a handshake like an oil salesman.

He, too, embraced his host.

Martin Overbrook Ellery did not know at all, although he recalled that one of the old red-brick buildings in Low Village bore the white-on-black stencil *Overbrook Paperbox Factory* on its grimy side walls. Overbrook was a feisty little fellow who came bursting in like the White Rabbit, glancing at his watch and crying, "Am I late, Mr. B.? I hope I'm not late—Jinny couldn't come, she's down sick—oh, she phoned Zelda, I forgot—congratulations," beaming all the while, the reports of his Yankee voice bouncing around the room like shellfire.

There were hail-fellow introductions and lively conversation, a good deal of it concerned with the unexpected presence of Wrightsville's self-adopted son; then Zelda Bauenfel came flying downstairs, everything bobbing, and there was more embracing, and some jokes about first anniversaries, and much laughter; whereupon Mrs. B. dug her elbow into Mr. B.'s meaty ribs and said, "You're a fine host, you are! Weren't you supposed to do something the very first thing? "; and Ernst Bauenfel seized his head and exclaimed, "Ach, I forgot! Excuse me a minute," and trotted out to return a moment later pushing a bar cart with a bucketed bottle of champagne on it and a queerly shaped liqueur bottle, six wine glasses, and a liqueur glass (and now he does look like a *biergarten* waiter, Ellery grinned to himself).

"Well, open it, Ernst," said Mrs. B., "what are you standing there for?"; and Mr. B. with a sly smile said, "Before the very first thing comes the *very* first thing, Zelda," and he took from the pocket of his jacket a jewel box and offered it to her, saying, "As a jeweler, I know that the first-anniversary gift should be a clock. But how could a clock express my feeling? Open it, *liebchen"*; and Zelda Bauenfel opened the box, and gasped, and held high a magnificent emerald bracelet, and burst into tears. Then she rushed into her husband's arms, and he said softly, "I wish I could give you the whole world,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Zelda," and it was said with such simplicity that no one was embarrassed, not even Ellery, who was allergic to clichés.

And when Zelda had blown her nose, and tried on the bracelet, and everyone had exclaimed over it, Ernst Bauenfel cried, "To work!" and he began struggling with the champagne cork, popping it unexpectedly and drenching himself, his young wife laughing so hard that every curve in her body described a parabola.

Then Mr. B. was filling the wine glasses and passing them around; and when Ellery said, "You've left yourself out, Mr. Bauenfel," Mr. B. shook his head and said, "Zelda will tell you I am no drinker, Mr. Queen. I never drink anything but the liqueur, and this only on very special occasions, like tonight," and he opened the liqueur bottle and poured himself a critical quantity of its topaz-colored contents, as if each drop was precious; and then he held up his glass and said, "My friends, a toast. I give you a German proverb: When an old man marries a young wife, death laughs. To my Zelda!" and the guests echoed, "Zelda!" and drank their champagne, and Ernst Bauenfel raised his liqueur glass to his lips and looked at his blushing wife over the rim, and chuckled, and threw his head back and drained the glass—which was not, in Ellery's view, the respectful way to imbibe a prized liqueur, even in a toast—and then the jeweler's eyes opened wide, and he clutched his throat with a hoarse cry and groped with the other hand as if seeking something to hang onto, and finally fell heavily to the floor, where he lay, incredibly, writhing.

And Ellery found himself on his knees beside the stricken man, saying, "Poison, poison. Anse, call Conk Farnham—hurry!" and while Chief Newby ran to phone Dr. Farnham, Franklin Lang led an open-mouthed young wife away, and Rob Packard and Martin Overbrook hovered over their recumbent friend with popping eyes. The writhings had stilled and the breathing had become shallow and very rapid. The complexion was already that of a corpse. "Mr. Bauenfel—Ernst," Ellery said urgently. "Can you hear me? Do you know who did this? Who poisoned your liqueur?"

The cyanosing lips tried desperately to tell him. But they could not. Then an odd thing happened. The dying man's left hand fumbled its way to his abdomen and found the lower left-hand pocket of his brocaded vest. With his forefinger and thumb he made his way in little stabs into the pocket. Then he withdrew his fingers and stretched out his hand as if offering something, and his heavy body arched like a drawn bow, and released its arrow.

And there he lay.

"Dead," said Ellery bitterly. "I swear I'll never set foot in Wrightsville again."

But then he opened Ernst Bauenfel's left hand. In it lay a large unset diamond.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

❖ ❖ ❖

"What was he trying to tell you?" Packard, the building contractor, muttered. "With a diamond, of all things," said little Overbrook, the paperbox manufacturer. "Why a diamond?"

But before Ellery could reply, Chief Newby came back.

"Dr. Farnham will be over as soon as they locate him," said the police chief, and then he stopped. "He's *dead?*" he said, looking down at his friend. "Mr. B.?"

"I'm sorry, Anse."

"You're sorry. We were his best friends."

"I know." And after a moment Ellery said, "A quick-acting poison. It can only have been in that bottle of whatever it is—the liqueur."

"Who could have wanted to kill Ernst?" said Packard. There were tears in his eyes; and Overbrook turned away.

The police chief picked up the bottle by the neck, sniffed its contents, and set it softly down. He was one of those occasional small compact men who contrive to look as if they are made of rock. His sensitive face was now as hard as the rest of him. He went over to the settee, unfolded an afghan, and draped it carefully over Ernst Bauenfel's body. Then he turned away, saying, "I never heard of this stuff," jerking his head toward the liqueur bottle. "What is it?"

Ellery came to. He inspected the label. "It's new to me, too. Made at a monastery in Switzerland. Zelda should know."

"Zelda does know," said Zelda; and the newly made widow appeared in the archway, followed by Lang, who was shaking his head as if to say, "I couldn't keep her away."

The young woman's face was blotched from weeping, but it was set in as rocky planes as Newby's. She went over to the corner of the settee, near her husband's body, and sat down. "No, I'm all right," she said as Ellery and Newby stepped toward her. "I want to help. I've got to help. Mr. Queen, what do you want to know?"

"All about the liqueur. I've never heard of it."

"It's never been sold outside Switzerland, because the monks could only make small quantities. Ernst adored it—it's the only alcohol he could drink, as he told you. Then the monastery was disbanded. Ernst bought up as many bottles as he could find—about half a dozen, I think it was—and brought them with him from the old country when he came to the United States."

"How many bottles are left?"

"This is the last one. He kept hoarding it. It's the only thing Ernst was selfish about."

"That's true, Ellery," Franklin Lang said. "Ernst would give you the socks off his feet, but in all the years I knew him he never offered me a drink out of this bottle. Did he ever offer you any, Rob?"

Packard shook his head, and Martin Overbrook said, "Mr. B. dead. It's not possible," and again turned away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"In other words, no one ever drank from this bottle except your husband, Zelda? Not even you?"

"That's right, Mr. Queen." Now she was struggling to control her voice. "In fact, tonight is the first time I've seen even Ernst drink any, there's so little left in the bottle. He was trying to make it last as long as possible."

"Then the poison could only have been intended for him," Chief Newby said in harsh tones. "And what's this I heard about a diamond, Ellery?"

"When you went to phone Farnham, I asked Bauenfel if he knew who poisoned him. He tried to talk but couldn't. The last act of his life was to take the diamond out of his vest pocket."

The police chief examined it. "I don't see anything special about it except its size. Do you know anything about this, Zelda?"

The young widow shook her head. "I didn't even know he was carrying it. Ernst often had unset gems in his pockets. Most jewelers do."

"He was trying to answer your question, Mr. Queen. Is that what you think?" asked the contractor.

"I don't see what other construction we can put on the last responsive act of a dying man," Ellery said. "Who killed you? I ask him, and he answers with a diamond. So we have to start from the diamond."

"A diamond," said the paperbox man, "is a diamond."

"Yes, Mr. Overbrook, but it also stands for something. Remember the occasion. This was his wedding anniversary party; the anniversary was uppermost on Ernst Bauenfel's mind. So let's think of a diamond in relation to wedding anniversaries.

"In the traditional listing," said Ellery, "the diamond is associated with the sixtieth and seventy-fifth wedding anniversaries. In that list the gift for a first anniversary is paper. But when Ernst, earlier this evening, mentioned the gift *he* associated with first anniversaries, he didn't say paper, he said a clock. Well, the clock as a first-anniversary gift happens to head the official list authorized by the jewelry industry. In the jewelers' list a diamond represents the thirtieth wedding anniversary. Ernst was a jeweler. We have the right to assume that, in answering my question as to who poisoned him, he replied with the jeweler's symbol for thirty."

"Thirty," muttered Chief Newby. "Who the devil could he have meant by thirty? It makes no sense."

Ellery was silent. Suddenly he said, "I hope no one will mind if I make an experiment? Mr. Overbrook, do you have a connection with anything associated with thirty?" The little manufacturer jumped. "You mean you suspect me of having poisoned Mr. B.'s bottle?" he sputtered. "I don't like your experiment, Mr. Queen! Or your question!"

"Why don't you answer it, Martie?" asked Zelda Bauenfel quietly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What do you mean, Zelda? I couldn't have been closer to Ernst if I'd been his brother!"

"Yes, Martie," she said, "but have you forgotten about the loan?"

"Loan?" Overbrook licked his lips. "I don't see what that has to do with anything. . . ."

"What loan?" asked Ellery.

"This is ridiculous! Three years ago I was foreman of the paperbox factory. The owner decided to retire. He offered me the chance to buy him out, but I didn't have nearly enough cash to put down, and I couldn't give the bank the collateral they wanted. Ernst came to my rescue. Without a cent of collateral he loaned me enough to finance my purchase of the factory."

"How much was the loan?"

Overbrook licked his lips again. "Thirty thousand dollars." He went on quickly, "But that's just a coincidence—"

"It may well be, because at least one other thirty is represented here." And Ellery swung about to face Franklin Lang.

"Me?" said Lang.

"I'm afraid so, Frank. As a newspaperman and managing editor of the *Record,* you don't have to be reminded that the numeral 30 written at the end of newspaper copy means 'the end'; it's a trade-wide symbol in journalism, at least in this country. I merely point it out, Frank."

The newspaperman snapped, "I felt toward Ernst the way Martie Overbrook and Rob Packard did, and everyone else in town. Four years ago I was hospitalized for eight months after an operation. I had no savings, and the medical expenses were enormous. Well, for almost that entire period Mr. B. paid my bills. Does it stand to reason I'd repay him with poison? It wasn't even a loan—Ernst wouldn't hear of my paying him back. Besides, about this thirty nonsense—how many people outside the newspaper field have ever heard of it?"

"A point," Ellery conceded. He looked at the building contractor. "I wonder, Mr. Packard, about you."

"And thirty?" Rob Packard nodded slowly. "It's a queer thing, Mr. Queen, but there's a tie between me and Ernst, too, in that regard. It was Ernst who got me out of the realty brokerage game. He owned a parcel out in Hill Valley, near the airport, and he came to me with a proposition. He foresaw that Wrightsville housing was going to expand in that direction, and he offered to put up the land and the financing, with me providing the know-how and the management, on a partnership basis. I snapped at it like a trout. It started me out as a building contractor. We named the development Thirty Acres, from the amount of land we built on. You'll find it on all the newer maps of Wrightsville." Then Packard said, "Does that sound as if I'd want to kill Ernst Bauenfel?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellery said ruefully, "I admit, motive in this case is the tough one. Probably half of Wrightsville could come up with similar favors that Mr. B. did for them. By the way, Zelda," he said suddenly, turning to her, "your husband was a wealthy man. And you're young enough to have been his daughter. Forgive me, but it's happened before. At the least, his death would mean to you—"

"In terms of gain, Mr. Queen," said Zelda Bauenfel, examining him as if he were a germ under a microscope, "absolutely nothing. When we got married a year ago, I insisted that Ernst write a will to leave Amy everything he had. I had reasons for this which aren't anyone's business, but in view of what's happened I'll tell you.

"In the first place there was the talk, as I suppose you've heard. Well, I didn't want Ernst—when he heard the gossip—to think I'd married him for his money.

"In the second place I wanted to protect Amy and, incidentally, reassure Ernst about her future. After all, I wasn't her real mother, and if Ernst died before I did, which was likely, he being so much older than I, Amy would be left to my care. We had quite an argument about the will. Finally, Ernst compromised. He made it out in such a way that, after three years, Amy and I would share his estate equally.

"With Ernst dead now, after only one year, I'm left with nothing. Why would I kill him? As unthinkable as that is."

"Not unthinkable," said Ellery gently. "Here's a possible reason, as old as the hills and as new as this spring: another man."

Her chin came up. "You look for one, Mr. Queen. You, too, Anse. Look all you want. You won't find any. I love my husband, and I've been faithful to him."

Ellery half turned away, frowning.

"Don't any of you blame Mr. Queen," said Chief Newby in a mumble. "Questions like these have to be asked. . . . Zelda, Ernst kept the liqueur bottle in the liquor cabinet in the dining room, didn't he? Did he keep the cabinet locked?"

"Ernst never locked anything here, Anse. You know that."

"Then anybody could have got that bottle! I don't know how many people in town have been entertained in this house at one time or another. We'll fingerprint the bottle, but my hunch is this is going to be a long, long job."

"Maybe not so long," said Ellery; and he turned to the widow again. "Zelda, you and Ernst weren't married in Wrightsville, were you?"

The question took her by surprise. "Well, no, Mr. Queen. We thought it . . . best to do it in Connhaven, and we went straight on to New York, where we spent our honeymoon. We left Amy with my mother while we were away."

"Then that could be it." Unaccountably, Ellery looked relaxed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and relieved. "There's no legal proof, Anse, but I can give you a theory that covers all the facts."

"Earlier this evening," said Ellery, "Zelda said that she had never seen Ernst take a drink of his private-stock liqueur before tonight. In recalling this, I wondered why he hadn't dipped into it when he and Zelda were married, which would surely be one of those extra-special occasions on which he could be expected to indulge. Zelda just gave us the reason: They weren't married in Wrightsville, and they spent their honeymoon in New York. So Mr. B. had no access to the bottle when he and Zelda married.

"Since only three or four weeks lapsed between his first wife's funeral and his remarriage, it's reasonable to assume that Ernst had last taken a drink from that bottle during his first marriage—*that is, while Hester Dade was still alive.*

"Put that together," said Ellery swiftly, "with the climate in this town a year ago. There was plenty of talk, you told me, Anse, when Mr. B. and Zelda Brown married. Zelda was working for Ernst up to that time. Suppose before her fatal automobile accident Hester had got a jump on the gossips—suspected that there was something going on between her husband and his secretary-bookkeeper. Suppose, true or not, it became an *idée fixe* in Hester's mind. Suppose, in her jealousy, Hester poured poison into the bottle of liqueur from which only her husband ever drank."

"Hester," Zelda Bauenfel whispered.

"Tonight, when he realized he had been poisoned," Ellery went on, "Mr. B. remembered something, just what we'll never learn. But it was enough to convince him that his liqueur had been poisoned by Hester. Unable to speak, he used his last strength and took out the diamond to leave us a clue—the 'thirty' clue. He was too far gone to realize that it might point to his three best friends as well."

"I still don't get it," complained the police chief. "How does this thirty thing tag Hester for the poisoning?"

"You told me yourself, Anse, on our drive up here. Hester, you said, was twenty-five years old when she gave birth to Amy. Amy is now five. You also told me that Ernst married Zelda on Hester's birthday. So today is not only Ernst's and Zelda's first wedding anniversary, *it would have been Hester's thirtieth birthday.*"

Chief Anselm Newby was never able to prove that Hester Dade Bauenfel reached out from the grave to kill Mr. Bountiful, but then Newby never pinned the murder on anyone else, either. To tell the truth, he didn't try very hard. As for Ellery, while it is to be doubted that his absence will remain permanent, the fact is he has not yet paid another visit to his favorite scene of the crime, Wrightsville.●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art by Mark Evan Walker

TRAIN TO NOWHERE

by Tom Tolnay

Bruce March had a dilemma. He had a secure job selling ad space for a newsletter and magazine published by a printing trade association in Philadelphia; at the same time, he and his wife Bonnie, and their children Andrew, Barbara, and Charlie, had long outgrown their two-bedroom apartment in the city. Working, playing, eating, and sleeping this close together fostered not a togetherness of spirit but a tightness of mind. An apartment with a single extra bedroom would've nearly doubled their rent, however, so it was finally decided—accepted is more like it—that it would be better to acquire a mortgage and commute than to throw a son or daughter or wife or husband out the window.

The house they ended up with was located only eighty-something miles west of the city. It had three bedrooms, a full basement, and came at a lower price tag than expected. At first. Built thirty-five or forty years earlier, it needed roof shingles, windows replaced, doors rehung, electrical and plumbing repairs, not to mention aluminum siding. These unanticipated expenditures

©1999 by Tom Tolnay

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forced the Marches to be more budget-wise than they had been in the city, and if they didn't want to trip over cables and pipe they had to move about as carefully as they'd had to in their old apartment. Nevertheless, the added space seemed to improve their dispositions: Mom and Dad argued less, and the children rarely threw punches at one another. As the workmen cleaned up and cleared out, and as the family slowly began to catch up with their bills, they took to roasting hot dogs in a hibachi in the little yard out back. Life hadn't been this relaxed since they were just starting out together, before the kids had arrived. There was a catch, however, for there is always a catch.

Tom Tolnay has worked as an editor-in-chief (for *Backstage Magazine)*, a publisher (for his own small publishing company), and as a managing editor (for The Smith Publishers). His first profession, however, is writer. For many years, Mr. Tolnay has been turning out fine short stories for magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post, Woman's World, Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, EQMM,* and many other publications. ¶

Driving to the station, boarding a train, and being able to read the newspaper en route to work—sometimes abetted by coffee in a paper cup (when he'd gotten to the station early enough to line up at the snack wagon)—was a pleasing change from pushing into a subway car with crowds of strangers, some of whom pressed up against him in a most personal way. But it didn't take him very long, perhaps half a year, to see this adventure for what it really was: a very long haul which, under the continual pressures of the clock, and a continual rattling of one's organs, wearied the mind and body. It took him somewhat longer to learn what it did to the soul.

Each weekday morning Bruce March would fall out of bed at 6 A.M., pull on his trousers in the chilled dimness, gulp down a cup of stale coffee, peck his wife's sour mouth, race the car fifteen miles to the railroad station, and leap into the train just as it was pulling away. In the city he used to get up at 8, sometimes 8:15, and he still got in around 9 A.M. via the subway—except when they had a derailment or a fire in one of the tunnels. Nowadays he used so many forms of transportation in the course of a single trip that he never knew when he'd arrive, nor in what condition.

First there were the mornings when the four cylinders in the maroon 1990 Dodge refused to kick over. But assuming it did get going, then the train might be held up due to "signal trouble," or the "lights and heat went down," or a "shortage of rolling stock"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would force many of them to stand. These verbal vaguenesses were delivered by men in dark blue uniforms, near as Bruce could tell, to keep passengers off balance, as if the railroad believed the less the passengers knew, the better. Even when the car started, and the train got through without mishaps or a "labor action," Bruce still had to deal with the subway, which had its own tendencies toward instability—and for reasons that were kept equally secret via worthless statements over staticky loudspeakers: "We have encountered a red signal." Bruce March now understood why conductors on trains and subways wore zookeepers' hats.

The distances involved should've meant a two-hour journey in each direction; usually it worked out, door-to-door, to around two and a half hours and, on rarer occasions—a snowstorm, power outage, or a train farther up (or down) the line had flattened a car (and its driver) at a crossing—it could be as long as four hours one way. One morning when the train showed up fifty-four minutes late, a brooding Bruce March tallied the average commuting time and found he was spending five to five and a quarter hours in transit nearly every weekday—about twenty-six hours a week, or more than three eight-hour work days. He was astonished, and immediately shared these findings with the attorney for a collection agency, a regular on the train, seated next to him. Slowly the man shifted his gray eyebrows away from the lined yellow pad he was scribbling on and inquired of Bruce: "How long have you been on this route?"

"About a year."

The attorney laughed with regulated condescension. "There is a woman in the first car who has been riding this line every day for thirty years."

This news stunned Bruce. Pulling the thin calculator out of the inside pocket of his suit jacket, he began poking the yellow buttons with his index finger and figured that the tenacious woman who rode in the first car had been traveling no fewer than 39,000 hours, and had used up the equivalent of four and a half years, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in a train or subway car! And when he thought of how many things could be done with one thousand, six hundred and forty-two days of one's life—the love to be made, the books to be read, the stamps to be put in his album, the movies to be watched on the VCR, the recreation room to be paneled, the camping trips to be taken with the kids . . . or just that extra hour or two of shut-eye in the morning, Bruce lowered his lids so he could be depressed in private.

A few weeks before Bruce had completed the second year of his tour of duty, the 5:33 P.M. diesel broke down between stations, halfway home. Everyone was ordered to get off; they had to wait

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for another engine to arrive and pull the dead locomotive out of the way and then to hook up with the passenger cars. Standing out on the large, unstable chunks of railroad gravel in the bleakness, leaning into the damp, raspy wind with several hundred icy-lipped commuters, he questioned whether it was all worth it. Late that night—when he finally threw his briefcase down on the sofa at home, tired and hungry and frustrated—he complained sharply to his wife (his children had already gone to bed) about the "constant torture" and "financial drain" of commuting. "One trip takes more out of me than a full day of selling those lousy one-inch ads!"

Bonnie was surprised, and slightly alarmed; her mind had entirely foreclosed on those four rooms back in the city, and she could not have moved back into an apartment any more than she could have gone to work in a coal mine. Patting her brown (beginning to gray) hair nervously, she quickly scraped the stiff pink spaghetti out of the pot onto a plate and said, "But honey, look at all the space we have."

Bruce made the mistake of aiming his bloodshot eyes through the archway into the living room: The armchairs and end tables were cluttered with shampoo bottles and pens and used tissues and earrings and dirty socks and magazines and dog biscuits. It seemed to him that the house was closing in on them, that more space merely created the need for more things they couldn't afford in order to fill that space. Peering down at the sticky jumble of spaghetti before him, he declared, "That's not space, that's chaos!"

"You have to get up early," Bonnie replied. "Why don't you go to bed?"

Next morning, even before unfolding his *Philadelphia Inquirer* on the train, Bruce March said to Jim Bulge, "Our lives are not made of inches or dollars. Our lives are made of minutes and hours."

This comment, out of nowhere, smacked a little too much of philosophy to suit a man who sold hardware wholesale all day, so Jim grew defensive: "The bums on skid row have all the time in the world, but not a nickel to spend or a square foot of their own to stand in."

Although they never had the time to get together "on the outside," Bruce and Jim considered themselves good friends—confidants and advisors who shared the trials of selling goods and services along with the tribulations of the daily commute, and whose perspective, therefore, could be trusted. Just like that Jim had enabled Bruce to see that he was a lot better off than a lot of other people. From that day on Bruce complained less and less about "the grind," as the regulars affectionately called the round-trip, and thought less and less about returning to the city. Anyway, the rents had tripled since his family had moved out, and he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

really did enjoy having a yard and basement and all that went with it. On his workbench sat a Stanley plane, plus a circular saw from Sears; he had a dream of one day building his own pool table. Unfortunately, he rarely seemed to have the time to use his tools—at least not for making things. Weekends he spent recovering from the week of travel and repairing whatever had gone wrong with the house and car during the week. By 6 A.M. Monday he was exhausted.

On a bright spring morning, a young man whom Bruce did not know sat down beside him in the train. Bruce was a little put off because the regulars liked to sit with regulars. But the younger man, who seemed as free and easy as a traveling salesman, started talking to him in a friendly way and, to Bruce's surprise, turned out to be fairly agreeable. Employed at a stock brokerage, he was hoping to get his broker's license one day so he could live comfortably without working too hard, he said with a smile. At one point in the conversation about their jobs and homes, however, the younger man said something that made Bruce wary: "How long have you been doing this commute?"

Without flinching, Bruce replied, "Five years."

"Phew!"

Bruce cranked up a superior smile. "You'll get used to it."

"I doubt it."

"There's a woman in the first car who's been riding these rails thirty-five years."

The younger man looked at Bruce with stretched, stricken eyes, and then grew untalkative. Bruce remembered how he'd felt years earlier, before his hair had acquired a salt-and-pepper look, but it didn't seem so terrible any longer. It was just something that had to be done, so he did it. Besides, he had made some lifelong friends on the train—they played cards, analyzed the Eagles football games, discussed the accomplishments (or failures) of their kids, told bitterly amusing anecdotes about their mothers-in-law, read racy passages from paperbacks aloud, described in detail how they'd told off their bosses, rehashed some grisly murder they'd seen reported on television, complained of how increasingly difficult it was getting to sell whatever it was they happened to sell, and in general managed to kill the time very effectively; five or six hours only seemed like two or three at most.

At the end of a long day at the office, Bruce would look forward to pulling himself up on the 5:33 to be reunited with his comrades, to find out how certain situations—the stories put on hold when they'd reached the station in the morning—had turned out for them during the day. Or to resume their card game. Or to tell a hot new joke. Or to hear how someone had landed (or lost) a huge sale. Since the regulars spent the best part of their days and evenings with each other, stimulated by their conversations, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well as by the beer and wine and whiskey some brought on board, by the time they lowered themselves off the train, somewhere between 7 and 9 P.M., depending upon their particular destination and how late the train was, their vitality and imagination and equilibrium were shot. After a luke-warm—often cold—dinner, and an hour or so of TV, a quick shower, and another sexless night, the process was begun all over again.

At home on Saturdays, Bruce would keep jumping up out of his armchair, as if late for an appointment. "Why don't you relax?" Bonnie would say with annoyance. This only made him more nervous, and he would stomp around the house barking for no apparent reason, making unreasonable demands on his wife and ordering his children about. Once he even kicked the dog: Andrew, Barbara, and Charlie stared at him as if he were one of those escaped lunatics who chatter to themselves on city streets. Since he loved all of them, including Dusty the dog, Bruce knew he was behaving badly. But he didn't know why, having come to believe he'd gotten used to the relentless travel required to enable him to peddle trade advertising all day long.

Each of the regulars expressed this frustration in his or her own special way. Quite a few became functioning alcoholics or got into cocaine (the cocaine crowd, according to his pal Jim, occasionally shared a snort with Nicko, the train's engineer). Some beat their wives and children. One accountant, it was rumored, started embezzling funds from her company, hoping to amass enough to escape the grind permanently. Several tried to write books (in transit) that were loaded with sex and violence. Yet others fell in love on the train, carrying on more or less complete relationships on the plastic-covered coil-springs without, as far as anyone knew, meeting in the world beyond the railroad car. And two or three gave their lives in the line of duty. Such was the fate of the woman who had been riding the train thirty-seven years. As the story was told on the 5:33, the regulars in the first car had simply assumed she was sleeping, as she often did, until her stop came and they couldn't wake her up. A newcomer (only fourteen months on track) in Bruce's car had joked that she'd died at the office and simply showed up on the 5:33 out of habit.

After years and years of rolling back and forth over the rails, an incident occurred that linked the commuters in Bruce's train in a permanent way. As usual, his crowd began to gather in the last car from about 5:10 P.M. on, saving seats for their pals who couldn't get out of the office as early, thereby excluding the one-time or part-time riders from their circle. Seats were swung back so that four of them could face each other, and they pulled cardboard ad posters off the wall to use as tables across their knees;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this was done in different sections of the car, spreading their domination throughout. Their community had developed to the degree that none of them felt comfortable, safe, until all the regular faces were accounted for, as though they would all be slightly less able to undergo the rigors of the trip unless they all did it together.

On this particular winter's night, just as the train rolled out from under the sloped tin roof of the terminal, Bruce came scrambling up the stairs from the subway and made a last desperate dash to catch up, running so hard he felt a sharp pain in his chest. But the boarding gate was closed, and the train pulled entirely free of the station; with briefcase in hand, he stood there rattling with outrage. It wasn't merely that the last of his energy had been completely wasted, that he would get home late again. What made it much worse was that he would be deprived of the company of his friends, of the beer and potato chips at day's end that made the routine seem less oppressive, of telling the story about a typographical error in an ad which became a profanity in print. Over and over he cursed the subway which had made him late. At last he turned and dragged his feet, like an obstinate child, toward a food stand, where he swallowed two hot dogs (mustard and sauerkraut) without tasting them.

In the last car on the train, his pals felt equally deprived, vaguely hollow; they began, as they did in all such cases, to speculate why Bruce wasn't on the train, starting with the most likely—a late subway train—but including a sales meeting that had run on too long. "You don't suppose he had to stay downtown to do some shopping?" one of them wondered out loud. "Definitely not; he would've mentioned it this morning." After reviewing all possibilities, they relented, agreeing to get to the bottom of this matter the next morning. The regulars settled into their conversations and card games and drinking and romances. But something was missing inside each of them.

In a wooded stretch of eastern Pennsylvania the 5:33 plunged into a dense, driving snowstorm; the train slowed down, hesitated a few times, then rolled forward more smoothly, though more slowly. When the interior lights went out, the card players moaned with annoyance, and someone called out, "Here we go again!" But the lovers were delighted by the darkness, snuggling deeper into their seats, squeezing each other's knees, touching breasts and brushing lips. The regulars were so attuned to the syncopations of the train that any alteration in its rhythm was a signal to them, so when the train began to pick up speed despite the storm, someone said, "What the hell's Nicko trying to prove?—hope no one gave him a whiff tonight." The commuters laughed nervously in the darkness. Now the train began to hesitate again with a series of short, jarring jerks. Many of the passengers peered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out the windows, something they rarely did on the return trip, but it was impossible to see anything in the snow-blown night.

At the station Bruce March entered the waiting room, a cavernous opening between a marble floor and metal-ribbed skylight, and gazed up at the huge round clock: 5:41. He checked it against his watch: 5:41. With forty-two minutes to kill before his next train, he started wandering around between the shellacked wooden benches, finally stopping before the newsstand at one end. Reading the headline of the evening daily—MAD DAD SLAYS SON & EX-WIFE AT BIRTHDAY PARTY—he was tempted to pick up a copy, but he felt too edgy to read. Though he'd been trying to stop smoking, he bought a pack of cigarettes instead and drifted among the white and black and gray faces of the commuters. Occasionally a face seemed familiar, though not enough to speak to. He looked up at the clock again: 5:47. Thirty-six minutes to go.

After another five minutes had passed Bruce sat down on a bench, not far from a woman with short-clipped hair who was tapping her black shoe impatiently on the shiny floor.

"Missed your train, too?" he inquired.

"I don't know why else I'd be sitting around this dump!" she spat, getting up and striding toward the coffee machine.

The whole world has gone nuts tonight, Bruce thought. Instead of increasing his annoyance, however, the sight and sound of the woman's agitation enabled Bruce to see himself more clearly. He moved to the door of the station, opened the pack of cigarettes, tapped one out, lit it, and took a few puffs. Soon he felt more relaxed. As a result, the hands of the clock seemed to skid along at a more merciful pace, for when he looked at his wrist it was 6:11. By this time he had pretty much accepted the separation from his traveling mates.

Bruce collected his briefcase and went out to where the trains nosed into the station. But the 6:23 had not pulled in at Gate 9. This was unusual: Generally a train would be in the station twenty to thirty minutes ahead of departure to receive passengers; this also allowed time for the engineer to check out the locomotive and for the conductors to clear out the leftover tabloids and coffee cups and snack wrappers. By 6:17 the train still had not arrived, and Bruce's stomach began to tighten like a fist again. By 6:30 the train had not appeared through the fine snow which had begun to fall, and the railroad personnel standing around with hands in pockets could tell the inquiring passengers no more than what was obvious. By 6:37 Bruce was muttering curses at the train, the station, at the unseen figures who ran the railroad.

At 6:44 he decided to call Bonnie and tell her to go ahead and eat dinner without him. The phone was busy. He dialed again and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again. "I'm going to beat the hell out of those kids—they've got to stop tying up the phone when I'm trying to call home!" Bruce said this out loud, and as a means of getting back at whatever it was that seemed determined to complicate his life, he slammed down the receiver with a crash. The noise caused him to look around, and standing not fifteen feet away was a policeman in his navy blue uniform and cap, looking directly at him. His left hand rested on his hip, and his right was at his hip, too, only the heel of this hand rested on the handle of the revolver, his fingers drumming the black leather holster, as if itching to pull out the gun and aim it at Bruce.

No law against slamming down a receiver, Bruce said to himself, wondering if the cop had heard him threaten to beat his kids. Bruce turned away from the phone and pretended to look for the train, but he could feel the policeman's eyes on him. You keep spying on me, he thought with a smirk, and I'll take that gun out of your holster and shoot you, the dispatcher, the ticket clerk, and maybe a redcap for good measure. Bruce March was not a violent person, but at that moment he was able to appreciate how that father had gone berserk and gunned down his own son and ex-wife.

By 6:53 there was no sign of his train, nor any indication of when it could be expected, so Bruce left the cop standing there and pushed into the Commuter's Cafe. He climbed up on a stool and demanded a Stroh's. The bushy-faced bartender growled. As Bruce took a long, steady swallow from the mug, he wondered who was winning the pinochle game on the train. After a few more swallows of beer, he glanced out the window and saw the cop standing near the door of the cafe, hands on hips. "What does he want?" Bruce mumbled.

"Did you ask for another beer?" said the bartender, looking away from the television to face his customer.

"I wasn't talking to you."

The bartender slapped a towel across the bar and turned his back on Bruce.

Bruce looked up at the television. It was too early for the 76ers game; instead they had a game show on—the host, flashing long white teeth, was spinning a large wheel with red, green, and black numbers. Four dumpy-looking men and women were standing before the host, giggling. Typical American consumers, Bruce thought. To kill more time he fantasized about walking into the television station waving that cop's revolver, and he even imagined himself squeezing off four shots until all the contestants lay in a heap. By the way, he said silently to the host, I've saved the last two bullets to blast that grin off your face.

Bruce wasn't sure what time it happened, but the picture went off the screen and there appeared a man with thinning hair in a pale blue shirt and purple tie, seated at an oval desk, holding a sheet of paper. The words NEWS BULLETIN kept blinking along the bot-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tom edge of the screen as the man spoke in short, tight sentences: "The five thirty-three express out of Philadelphia, destined for Harrisburg, has collided with another train that had broken down earlier in a heavy snowstorm. Initial reports indicate the engineer of the five thirty-three ran a flashing red stop signal. At this hour firemen and rescue workers are attempting to free passengers from the fiery wreckage. While it is too early to assess injuries and damage, authorities fear that many have died. Our news team is on the scene to bring you the following live report. . . . "

A woman in a short fur coat blinked onto the screen and began speaking quickly into the microphone in her hand, the frosty breath shooting out of her bright red mouth, the snow swirling around her blond head. Now the camera turned away, presenting images of twisted and crumpled steel, of dense smoke pouring out of shattered windows, while men in rubber coats and hard helmets moved like rats over the carcass of the train. A collective cry arose in the cafe, followed quickly by silence. Everyone sat so still, staring at the TV, that they seemed to be bolted to the heavy stools, the wooden bar and tables. Wondering if his friend Jim Bulge had gotten out of the wreckage okay, Bruce peered at the scene to see if he could recognize anyone. Now Bruce noticed a narrow white thing lying parallel to a sprung section of track; he realized it was a human arm, and a not unpleasant shiver passed through his body.

Just as suddenly as it had gone off the air, the game show returned, and the host, that same grin stuck on his flat face, was in the act of spinning the painted wheel. The cafe grew noisy again, a congested sound of humanity rising slowly, steadily. Bruce glanced out the window. The cop had disappeared. Sliding off the stool and pushing through the swinging door, he went out into the station without realizing he'd left his briefcase behind. Others came out of the cafe, rushing past him, and as the news of the accident spread through the terminal, the movement around Bruce seemed to become as herky-jerky as Keystone Kops dashing about in a silent movie. Peering over his shoulder, he saw no sign of the policeman and, without checking the clock, he entered Gate 9.

The snow was whipping thickly over the platform, but he did not bother to button his coat. For a long while he looked out along the pair of rails, polished by the immense weight they had supported over the years, searching for the great white eye of the train. The distant darkness held together in one piece. Though it was cold in the wind and snow, and though the passengers counting on the 6:23 had dispersed, Bruce March continued to stand out and wait for his train. It was printed on the timetable. Eventually it had to show up. And when it did, he wanted to move close to those shiny rails, so comforting in their parallel harmony, and watch the giant wheels of steel roll toward him. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Gilbert and Sullivan Clue

by Jon L. Breen

As in Ed Hoch's pastiche (p.100), the Ellery Queen we meet in the following story is a contemporary of ours—there is even a reference here to Y2K! But it is clear which phase of the original Ellery Queen's career Jon Breen has been inspired by: This is Ellery Queen the Hollywood screen writer. Ellery's shift to the West Coast corresponded to the publication of Queen material in national magazines. With Inspector Queen still in N.Y., Ellery mostly goes it alone. †

The voice on the telephone said, "How are you, Ellery?"

Gazing at the Hollywood hills from his insanely luxurious hotel suite, Mr. Ellery Queen answered honestly, "Worn to a nub by the pressures of the treadmill, racked with guilt at stealing money for doing nothing a roomful of word-processing chimpanzees couldn't do as well, terminally bored by sunny weather, and ready to return to the restful chaos of New York City. Who is this?"

"Same old Ellery," his caller laughed. "It's Gil Castberg."

Castberg was a Hollywood agent, a snappy dressing cheapskate with more high-powered clients than Southern California Edison. "Sounds like you need to get away. When are you leaving for the Big Apple?"

"I'm here till Wednesday, when for reasons too complicated to explain I must needs take one more meeting and do one more lunch before returning to civilization."

"Nothing to occupy you till then?"

"Apart from plotting the murder of a twenty-two-year-old studio executive who never heard of Dashiell Hammett, nothing."

"How about a cruise? As my guest."

"That's kind of you, but where to?"

"Nowhere."

©1999 by Jon L. Breen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sounds perfect."

For two days and three nights in January, said Gil Castberg, the smallish but luxurious ship *Sea Twin* would cruise the California coast, beginning and ending in San Pedro, offering champagne, entertainment, and no ports of call. A lady friend for whom Castberg had procured a separate cabin had sent regrets at the last moment.

The headline entertainer on the cruise was to be an old Castberg client, Ozzie Foyle, once of the comedy team of Dugan and Foyle but for the past ten years a single act. Ellery had done the second or third version of the script for the team's last film together, a detective comedy, but nothing of his had wound up on the screen. The producers had decided such frills as fair clues, sensible motivation, and plotting logic undermined their concept.

"So why did Dugan and Foyle break up the act, Gil?" Ellery inquired, sipping Mumm's Cordon Rouge under a grey sky on the deck of *Sea Twin*. A half-hour out of San Pedro, the sea was already choppy.

The agent shrugged. "Who knows with these artistic types? They never did get along, and Ozzie wanted to stretch his wings. He signed up for six weeks of *Waiting for Godot* at a little theatre in Hollywood, working for Equity scale. Dugan was on vacation. Funding came through suddenly for a *Star Wars* parody that would've been the perfect follow-up to their detective flick, but they'd have had to fly to Canada immediately to start shooting. Foyle refused to pull out of his stage engagement. Dugan got pissed, called his partner a pretentious poser, and took a walk. Ozzie was just as happy. He'd saved his money and wanted to do more serious stuff. *Godot's* an entrée into high culture for low comedians. Bert Lahr played in it. Chico Marx."

"I thought Groucho was Foyle's idol," Ellery remarked.

"Well, Groucho loved Gilbert and Sullivan, but he wasn't the specialist Foyle's become. Ozzie's been appearing in productions of the operettas all over the country. Again, not much money, but he's happy and fulfilled."

"And still rich."

"It doesn't hurt."

"Is Foyle still your client, Gil?"

"No, we parted company. Still friends, though, or I wouldn't be here."

"What became of Joey Dugan? I haven't heard much of him since the team split."

"Neither have I, neither has anybody," said a querulous voice behind Ellery. Swinging around, he beheld a familiar lanky figure leaning against the deck railing. The sad-eyed hound-dog features of Joey Dugan, the skilled straight man of the Foyle and Dugan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

team, looked more lugubrious than ever. "Actually my career went just where this tub is going, right, Gil? A voyage to nowhere. Hiya, Ellery, good to see you. Wish we'd'a shot your script; I love a good mystery, but these days you gotta blow up stuff. That's the key to a good gross. My partner, typically, overdid it. Blew up Dugan and Foyle so he could pander to the opera crowd."

"I wish I could get you boys back together," Gil said.

"There are a few slight barriers." Joey Dugan enumerated them on his fingers. "One, my former partner is suddenly allergic to anything that appeals to an audience without tuxedos and lorgnettes. Two, my former partner probably has *Mikado* and *H.M.S. Pinafore* engagements up the wazoo five years into the new millennium. Three, by now most fans think Dugan and Foyle are about as cutting edge as Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello. Four, I can't stand to be in the same room with the little bastard. But I guess a great agent like you can overcome minor things like that, huh, Gil?"

"Is that the point of this reunion?" Ellery asked. "You want to get them back together?"

"If I thought I could," said Gil. "But it's no reunion. I didn't even know Joey was going to be on the cruise."

"Sadie wanted to come. I figured what the hell, I got nothing better to do, and this ship may not be the *Queen Mary* but it's big enough I can avoid running into Foyle for three days."

Ellery said, "You two worked so well together. Did you hate each other all that time?"

"Naw, not till the second week. The little creep thinks he's a genius, thinks he was the whole act because he was the funny one. But he knew how important my part was, just wouldn't admit it. Ozzie Foyle would always go that little bit too far, add that one last unnecessary frill, milk a gag just a beat beyond where the laugh peaked. I could rein him in."

"The straight man never gets his due," said Gil. "Show biz tradition."

"Sure. Take Bud Abbott. Brilliant performer, criminally underrated. It's good George Burns got some appreciation in his last years. Gracie was great, sure, but George was the key to that act. Well, gotta go meet the wife. See you guys around."

As Dugan loped off, Gil Castberg muttered, "Sadie's on board."

"Is that a problem?" Ellery asked.

"It makes it all the more important those two guys stay out of each other's way. The break-up of Dugan and Foyle had more to do with Sadie than Samuel Beckett."

Across the empty swimming pool, Ellery noticed a young woman in a long raincoat looking pensively out at the Pacific.

"Lovely girl," he said softly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah," Castberg agreed, "but she tries so hard to hide it. Has to in her position. That's Rainbow McAllister, Ozzie Foyle's assistant."

A couple of hours later, after a nudge to the maître d', Ellery found himself at a table for two in the dining room, with Rainbow McAllister. ("Hippie parents," she explained.)

"So are you part of the Dugan camp or the Foyle camp?" Rainbow asked over the sorbet course.

"Neither."

"Good. There must be hundreds of people on board who never even met Dugan or Foyle, but every time I turn around I see some of the old crowd."

"I understand you work for Foyle."

"His personal assistant. I answer his mail, read the scripts that come over the transom, that kind of stuff. His wife Amanda's jealous as hell, so I also have to keep out of the way as much as I can."

"And do your best to look like Little Orphan Annie?"

"Not hard, I'm afraid. The funny thing is, I'm not the least bit attracted to Ozzie Foyle, and God knows he's not attracted to me."

"If he's a straight male, I have a hard time believing that last part. So tell me about the old crowd, as you call it."

"At that table to your left are four of them. The skinny guy who looks like an accountant is Ozzie's accountant, Fred Breedlove. No sense of humor, but nice. The huge African-American with the earring is Dale Washington, known professionally as Daddy Trash. He's a rap singer who loves Gilbert and Sullivan, go figure. The short crewcut is Marlon Crandall, old pal of Ozzie's on the comedy-club circuit, now raking it in as a TV evangelist—I think he's funnier doing that than as a standup. The one with the grey hair is Herman Gable, Ozzie's accompanist, forty and doesn't look a day over seventy. Oooh, look at that."

Ellery was already looking. A six-foot blonde in a revealing gold gown was striding across the room, seemingly oblivious to the masculine eyes following her. She passed a shorter, older, darker, and heavier woman who, Ellery suspected, probably had cut an equally striking figure twenty years ago. The women acknowledged each other with glares.

"The blonde," Rainbow whispered, "is Amanda, Ozzie's trophy wife, his third."

"He's been married three times?"

"Four times, but that's his third trophy wife. The other one is Sadie Dugan, Joey's wife. They say she and Ozzie had an affair once, but it was before my time."

After several more courses of Japanese-themed nouveau cuisine (pretty but sparse), Rainbow agreed to accompany Ellery to the ship's impressive tiered showroom to see Ozzie Foyle's one-man

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

performance. Their table far to one side afforded a good view of the stage and an even better one of the glittering front row. Daddy Trash and Marlon Crandall sat at a ringside table with Amanda Foyle and Fred Breedlove. Gil Castberg was seated a few tables away with a young woman Ellery didn't recognize. Surprisingly, Joey and Sadie Dugan also had ringside seats. Given what Dugan had said about his old partner, could he even stand to watch him perform?

"This is quite a crowd," Rainbow whispered. "There's an L.A. County supervisor and his wife at that table next to Dugan, and the guy with them may back a Broadway show Ozzie hopes to get off the ground. The girl with him would like to be in the show."

Every seat was filled when Ozzie Foyle came on stage at ten o'clock. The short, cherubic-looking comic bowed to the ovation, did a few cruise-ship jokes to more laughter than they deserved, and began a rapid-fire Gilbert and Sullivan medley, with selections from *Trial by Jury, H.M.S. Pinafore,* and *The Pirates of Penzance.*

When Foyle brought out an oversized, dangerous-looking samurai sword and started brandishing it with clownish clumsiness, the audience knew what was coming: Foyle's theme song from *The Mikado,* in which Ko-Ko, the comic Lord High Executioner, tells what he would do in the event he actually had to carry out an execution. In long-honored theatrical tradition, new lyrics had been freshly minted for the occasion.

"As someday it may happen that a victim must be found,/ I've got a little list, I've got a little list—"

A fresh outburst of applause covered up the second line. Herman Gable, Foyle's frail and wasted-looking piano accompanist, vamped for a bit while the comedian beamed and bowed, waiting for the ovation to subside.

"A group of fellow voyagers who might as well be drowned;/ They never would be missed; they never would be missed./ There's the exercising ingenue who runs six miles a day, /The glum computer expert who drones on of Y2K, /The posturing politicos who won't say what they mean,/The philanthropic patron who loves every other scene—/The pierced and tattooed rapper who's just waiting to be dissed—/They'd none of them be missed—they'd none of them be missed!"

Several good-natured smiles and guffaws from the front-row targets—the girl with the potential angel must have been the exercising ingenue given her whoop of delight—greeted this first verse.

"That parasitic agent who lives royally off your toil,/And the rich evangelist—I've got him on the list!/The fickle fans who ask you,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'Weren't you once Ozzie Foyle?' /They never would be missed—they never would be missed!"

Comic turned preacher Marlon Crandall looked like a man who resented the crack but was determined to be a good sport. Gil Castberg smiled convincingly. But laughter was less general now, not because of the more personal nature of the attacks—most of those in the crowd wouldn't get them anyway—but because Ozzie Foyle's manner had changed. No longer good-humored, he seemed to be putting the lines across with genuine venom. Even those not targeted were feeling uneasy without knowing why.

"The former partner whining 'cause he cannot get a job, /The tennis player sobbing 'cause she cannot hit a lob, /The broad who married money but divorces poverty, /Who'd come into your cabin for a price upon the sea, /That superior freeloading detective novelist—/I don't think he'd be missed—I'm sure he'd not be missed."

"Why the attack?" Ellery murmured to his companion. "I'm not freeloading off him."

"And that sniveling accountant, who says the money's gone, /A math contortionist—I've got him on the list! /That love-starved married lady who will vanish with the dawn—/No more will she be missed—she is no longer missed!"

Foyle was shouting the lines more than singing them, and the audience sensed a great talent in full meltdown. A pained-looking cruise director had stepped tentatively onto the stage as if to interrupt Foyle, but the comedian held him off with a gesture.

"There's that wife who spends my money in exchange for jealous glares;/That bad piano player who snorts cocaine all he dares;/Those patronizing toadies that we call an entourage;/Those unrepentant roadies with their half-wit badinage;/All who would drain genius of its reason to exist;/They damned well won't be missed, and I have . . . them . . . on . . . my . . . list."

Foyle gave an ironic bow. There was no applause, just stunned silence. The stage lights dimmed, the houselights came up, and Joey Dugan bounded onto the stage with the apparent intent of throttling his former partner.

"I've had all I'm going to take from you, you little bastard!" Dugan roared. The shorter man stood his ground as Dugan was restrained by a burly waiter. Several other bodies, ship's crew and passengers, insinuated themselves between them.

Rainbow said softly, "Out of character."

"Who? Foyle you mean?"

"Oh, no, Ozzie didn't surprise me. I've seen his tirades. But for Dugan to go postal like that . . . he's cynical, sarcastic, sure, but always in control."

"I didn't catch all the allusions," Ellery admitted.

"Well, I'm the sobbing tennis player," Rainbow said wryly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thought I'd be playing at Wimbledon by now, not gofering for Ozzie Foyle. The love-starved married lady is probably Mrs. Dugan—that'll be what set Dugan off, more than the crack about him. The broad who married money—well, there are so many, how can I narrow it to just one? I'm a little tired, Ellery. Shall we call it a night?"

After Ellery returned to his cabin, the gentle rocking of the ship sent him off to sleep surprisingly quickly. When the ringing of the telephone interrupted his slumber, he glanced at his watch and saw that it was three A.M.

"Mr. Queen, this is Captain Badger speaking." The crisp British tones had an uneasy edge. "I'm sorry to interrupt your rest, but there's an awkward matter I'd like your help with. It's, ah, well, it's murder actually."

"That is awkward, Captain, I'll agree. Who's been murdered?"

"Mr. Ozzie Foyle. His wife, returning to their suite rather late, found his body stretched out on their bed. There's quite a lot of blood. It looks like a stab wound in the back. It's, ah, really horrible, and I need your advice."

"Put into the next available port and turn the case over to the local police."

"Well, yes, that of course, but given your proven expertise in these matters, I thought perhaps . . . you do have a reputation as a detective. They call you Maestro, don't they?"

"Only Sergeant Velie, who works for my father, and in light of some of my failures, I've always found the expression rather ironic."

"Well, ah, in any case, couldn't you just have a look?"

"I guess so," Ellery said, with feigned reluctance. "What's Foyle's cabin number?"

"Suite 1B. On the deck above you. I'd be obliged if you didn't mention what's happened to any other passengers."

As he was dressing hurriedly, Ellery heard a tapping on the door of his cabin. Had the impatient captain sent an escort for him?

Opening the door, he found a short, fat, bald man in an expensive gold-dragon robe standing in the doorway, smiling apologetically.

It was Ozzie Foyle.

"Can we talk a minute, Ellery? I heard you moving around in here, so I knew I wasn't—is something wrong?"

"Come in, Ozzie. I regret to inform you that you're a dead man."

"Hey, I know I got a little rough in my act tonight, but nobody's come after me yet."

"Don't be too sure. Somebody they think is you has been found dead in your cabin. Why weren't you there? And who took your place?"

"Ellery, is this a joke? Did I sign on for a murder mystery cruise without knowing it?"

"It's serious. Tell me what's been going on this evening."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The comedian scratched his bald head. "I had a fight with Amanda after the show. I was trying to apologize for the act. I wasn't myself. Those lyrics just sort of came out."

"Lyrics don't just sort of come out in that kind of perfect meter. Those were premeditated insults."

Foyle shook his head. "No, no, they were all in fun. It wasn't the words, you know. It was the delivery. If I sang them the usual way, you know, light, people would see I was only joking. But I've been taking this new medication. It's supposed to help my crazy mood swings, but sometimes I think it brings them on instead. That's why I sang those lines the offensive way I did. Do you think I'd want to offend a guy like Gil Castberg, who did a lot for my career, or my accountant, Fred Breedlove, a terrific guy, good sport even if he doesn't get the jokes, or Herman, my accompanist, who hasn't put anything but his asthma inhaler in his nose for ten years, or my wife, who's very sweet when she's not terrorizing my assistant, or a swell writer like yourself? Did I ever tell you, by the way, I wish we'd shot your script? Dugan was against it, but he has no taste at all."

"Ozzie, the person who thinks he killed you may have been one of the targets of your *Mikado* parody."

"There was no motive for murder in that song, Ellery. Till that pathetic whiner Joey Dugan came after me, I didn't realize what I was doing. By then I wanted to apologize to everybody, even Dugan, but I got escorted back to the cabin by three big crew members who kept telling me everybody should sleep on it. When my wife came back, like I said, I tried to apologize but she wouldn't hear of it and we had a fight and she stormed out. I just wanted to sleep then—I'd had a drink and I shouldn't mix that with the medication—but I didn't want to be there in the cabin when she came back. Better we both cool off a little, right? So I looked for somebody who'd loan me their cabin for a few hours. I found Gil Castberg in the lounge, apologized about the song. He took it well. Gil's a good sport. I said I was looking for a place to sleep. He said he thought he had something lined up for the night, a girl I guess, you know Gil, and anyway, he wouldn't need his cabin. Use hers, I guess. So he gave me his key."

"And did you give him yours?"

Foyle looked blank for a moment. "I suppose I did. I don't really know why. He wasn't going to sleep there. Unless he was sleeping with Amanda." With automatic comic timing, Foyle paused and said, "That was a joke." Another pause. "Wasn't it?"

Ellery did not laugh. "Ozzie, stay in this room. Don't communicate with anyone else and don't let anyone in but me. You may have given somebody a motive in that song without even knowing it."

"Dugan wouldn't kill me. He doesn't have the spine for it. You

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know, he never appreciated me. Always thought he was the straw that stirred the drink. Now a straight man is important, but who was getting the laughs? And who made a career for himself as a single? Not Joey Dugan."

"Ozzie, stay here. Please."

When he reached Foyle's suite, Ellery was met at the door by the dapper but shaken Captain Badger.

"Mr. Queen, is it true the murderer always returns to the scene of the crime?"

"A stupid murderer might, I suppose. Why?"

"Just moments ago, while my officers and I were, ah, securing the murder scene, someone came dashing down the passageway and threw that through the door."

The captain pointed. Soiling the white carpet of the opulent suite's sitting room was the huge samurai sword Foyle had used as a prop. Its tip was bloodied.

"Deuced considerate of the killer to bring us back the weapon, eh?" the captain said with forced nonchalance.

"Did you get a look at him?"

"No, one of my officers gave chase, but the fellow was not to be found."

"You haven't touched the sword?"

"Certainly not. We'll leave it where it lies. Would you care to view the body, Mr. Queen?"

"Please." And find out who it is, Ellery added to himself.

They looked into the bedroom over a length of red ribbon, spanning the doorway in lieu of a crime-scene tape and adding an incongruously cheery touch. The body lay facedown on the bed, covered by a dressing gown with a springing tiger on its back.

"Mr. Queen," said Captain Badger, "in the excitement I nearly forgot to tell you. The victim is not Foyle."

"Who is it?"

"Gil Castberg, Foyle's former agent. He was wearing one of Foyle's dressing gowns, so Mrs. Foyle mistook him for her husband. And so, apparently, did the murderer."

Ellery took in as much of the murder scene as he could from the doorway.

There was plenty of blood from the wound but not much other sign of struggle. The scene had an oddly staged look about it. A large book lay open on the bedside table, neatly undisturbed. Ellery peered at it from a distance.

"I recognized that book at once," said the Captain. "A very fine illustrated edition of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas. I'm a bit of a bibliophile, Mr. Queen, as I believe you are as well."

"The book is open to the first page of *Utopia Limited,*" Ellery

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

observed. "Do you know if that play contributed to Foyle's repertoire?"

"I rather doubt it. One of the team's lesser works, in fact."

"Why would the book be open to that play?"

"A dying message?" the captain ventured.

"Hardly. Even if Castberg could have left us a clue in his dying moments after that stab wound, I don't imagine he could have done it so neatly. Has anyone been in the room?"

"Mrs. Foyle took a couple of steps in, recoiled at what she saw, and called the bridge. The ship's doctor did nothing beyond assuring himself the victim was beyond help. Then we put up the ribbon, as you see."

"Obviously the room and the weapon must be untouched until the police can come on board. In the meantime, you and I can begin an investigation. I'm afraid we'll have to wake a few people up."

"Starting with Mr. Joey Dugan?"

Dugan proved to have an alibi. His well-attended poker game had broken up a few minutes after the body of Castberg had been discovered. Most of the other targets on Foyle's little list, including rapper Daddy Trash, accountant Fred Breedlove, pianist Herman Gable, evangelist Marlon Crandall, and Ellery's new friend Rainbow McAllister had retired to their cabins, alone, hours earlier. When Castberg's date for the concert was located, her testimony was particularly interesting: they had had a pleasant chat, but certainly had no carnal plans for the evening.

When Ellery returned to his own cabin, he found Ozzie Foyle waiting anxiously. "Who was killed, Ellery? What happened?"

"I think you know the answer to that, Ozzie. Why did you and Joey Dugan put aside your differences and plan Gil Castberg's murder?"

Ozzie gaped at him. "I couldn't have killed him, Ellery. I was here with you when . . ." Ozzie realized his slip a little late.

"When what, Ozzie?"

As the *Sea Twin* neared San Pedro, its return a couple of days early, Ozzie Foyle and Joey Dugan were in discreet custody in Captain Badger's office, resigned to being turned over to the police. Ellery and the Captain listened to Foyle's story.

"He deserved to die. Actors are simple people, you know, gullible, not good with figures, wrapped up in their art. Who knows how many of his other clients Gil Castberg swindled? You know, I killed him, really. Joey's an accessory at best. I'm the real murderer here, Ellery."

"I'm a full partner, damn you," Dugan retorted. "It's just like you to hog all the credit."

"Some time after we broke up the act, Fred Breedlove figured

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out that Gil Castberg had been systematically cheating us for years. He kept all the records for the team and was constantly draining off money for himself, way beyond his commission, which was big enough. We were doing so well in those years, we didn't notice. If either of us ever questioned anything, Castberg would put the blame on the other one. I was sure Dugan was running up needless expenses."

"And I thought Foyle was," said Dugan. "It made me hate him more than I did already."

"We never talked about business," Foyle said. "We never talked about anything except the act."

"And we fought about that," Dugan agreed.

"Castberg sailed too close to the wind, though. Things got dangerous for him. He knew he'd be found out soon unless he could prod us into dissolving the partnership. That stuff about the sudden call from Canada to start shooting our sci-fi movie during my run in *Waiting for Godot* was all orchestrated by Castberg, designed to break up the team. And it worked. He knew just the right buttons to push to make us go after each other and stay on good terms with him. So we split up, him crying crocodile tears while breathing a sigh of relief and thinking his game wouldn't be found out."

"When Breedlove did find out, Ozzie and I got together again," Dugan said, "united against a common enemy. For Ozzie it was all an ego thing."

"Hell, it was a humanitarian thing, ridding the world of a scumbag."

"Yeah, sure. For me, it cut more deeply. Castberg had ruined my career."

"So you got it together one more time and plotted Castberg's murder," Ellery said. "Ozzie would do an over-the-top, offensive show to make himself an obvious target for murder. You, Joey, would be so incensed you'd have to be physically restrained from publicly killing your partner. He'd murder Castberg with the samurai sword at a time when you had a perfect card-playing alibi. Then, while he was talking to me and had an equally strong alibi, you'd come charging down the corridor to deliver the samurai sword to Captain Badger and his officers. Each of you alibied for one part of the crime. A perfect collaboration, one last time, all the while convincing the world you hated each other."

"So how'd you get on to us?" Foyle demanded. "I thought it was a great plan."

"It was like something out of a Charlie Chan movie," Ellery scoffed.

"Well, yeah, as a matter of fact, it was. But still, what did we do wrong?"

"For one thing, your story about trading rooms with Castberg

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't wash. I could see it if he really was planning to spend the night somewhere else, but I couldn't believe he'd go into your cabin and put on your robe and sleep in your bed when your wife might be coming back at any time, which she did. How did you get him to put on the robe, by the way, Ozzie?"

"He always admired my robes. I got him to come to the suite on a pretext of talking business. He liked the robe, and I invited him to try it on. Piece of cake."

"Another thing that bothered me was how this cruise came about. How did Castberg happen to be on the cruise in the first place, and why was such a notorious cheapskate so quick to offer a free cruise to me on the spur of the moment? He couldn't have been paying for it—if he were, he'd be demanding a refund from the cruise line, not inviting me. I was indignant about that line in your Mikado parody about my freeloading because, though I was freeloading in a sense, it wasn't off you. But if you gave Castberg his tickets, in a sense I was freeloading off you. Your inviting Castberg could have been quite innocent, I realize, just as the presence as your guests of Daddy Trash and Marlon Crandall could be innocent. But what was your old partner, the man who couldn't stand to be in the same room, doing on the cruise anyway? And why did Joey Dugan act so out of character in his rushing-the-stage tirade after your act? It just didn't add up, unless you were cooking something up together.

"With all that, however, I might not have figured it out without that deliberate clue you left me, Ozzie."

"What deliberate clue?" Joey Dugan demanded.

"The book on the side table. Gilbert and Sullivan, like Dugan and Foyle, accomplished great things together despite strong personal differences. Ozzie, you left that collection of libretti open to one of their more obscure works, *Utopia Limited.* And what is significant about *Utopia Limited?* It was the operetta Gilbert and Sullivan completed after they had dissolved their partnership and been induced to collaborate one last time. Leaving that book open as it was told me that the murder of Gil Castberg was Dugan and Foyle's *Utopia Limited."*

"You did it again," Joey Dugan said, more sadly than heatedly. "Always that last bit of gilding to make the goddamn lily droop, that last drop of milk out of the gag. A clue that implicates us just to show how clever you are. How could I ever work with you all those years, Foyle?"

Ozzie Foyle leaned over to his partner and said in a stage whisper, "It'll help with the insanity defense. You know we'll never be convicted. You know what juries are like nowadays. Face it, Dugan, I'm always thinking of the act." ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF FIRST STORIES

THE NAUGHTY PROFESSOR

by Douglas McKinstry

We'll let talented debut author Douglas McKinstry introduce himself: "For eleven years, I've taught composition and literature at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. I love many kinds of fiction, including mystery, detective, and crime. I've taught Poe and Chandler, but most of my mystery reading has been in magazines such as yours. I have a one-year old son named Adam, also a delightful mystery to me. †

Harry Peeler sat in his cluttered office reading a student essay, nodding off from time to time. A May breeze drifted through the open window and stroked his stubbled face. The door was open for office hours, but with his back to it, and his eyelids lowered to the inpouring breath of honeysuckle, Harry didn't know he had company. He awoke with a start when he heard his name. The voice was clear and deep.

Harry swiveled slowly around, instinctively depressed at the masculine timbre of the intrusion. He looked up. When he saw who it was, one of his brightest British Literature students, he cheered a little. If it wasn't a coed, at least it was a thinking being. At this late stage of the semester, Harry knew all his students by name, male and female. This fellow he had known since week two. This one was a talker. Unlike the majority of students, talkers didn't have to be forced to participate.

"Could I see you for a minute?" the young man asked, standing at the border of the hallway and Harry's office. He was over six feet tall and heavyset, a mass of muscle and fat, Harry saw, in an unconscious survey of the visitor. He was dressed like many other undergraduate students in May, in an untucked T-shirt, baggy shorts past the knees, white socks, and scruffy name-brand tennis shoes. His dark hair was a week-old buzz. He wore no glasses, and from ten feet away his blue eyes sparkled like sunlit pools. Harry

©1999 by Douglas McKinstry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

invited him in, indicating a chair for visitors, then stole a glance at his watch. He didn't mind short visits with intelligent students. Actually he enjoyed them.

"You're Eric Jamison, right?" Harry asked half cordially, half imperiously. He liked to intimidate students a little, especially burly or athletic males.

"Right," said Jamison, apparently not intimidated at all. He sat on the edge of the chair Harry had shown him and leaned forward, closing the distance between them. Harry leaned back in his own chair, a deeper and more comfortable one than his guest's.

"I'd like to talk about my grade," Jamison said, without the trace of a smile on his mouth or in his glittery eyes.

"Okay," Harry said gruffly, ready if necessary for a test of wills.

"I really need an A." Jamison grinned a little, baring a portion of his upper teeth. Harry thought the grin was faintly malicious.

"And why do you need an A?" he asked, only half amused at the gall of a declaration he'd heard a hundred other times in twenty years of teaching, and suppressing, as always, the answer he wanted to give: "Then why don't you earn one?"

"Because I've never made anything but A's," Jamison said briskly, as if asserting the conclusion of a logical proof worked out ahead of time. "I don't make B's or B+'s. Just A's." Still he jutted forward, his meaty head hovering over a front corner of Harry's desk. But for his attire, Harry thought, the young man looked like an insurance salesman hell-bent on "closing" a client. Above each brown eyebrow Harry saw a thin line of sweat.

In nine out of ten such conversations, Harry would deliver a short lecture on perfectionism and overvaluation of the grade-point average. In this and some other extreme cases, he preferred to go straight to his grade book, which he kept always, along with textbooks and other materials, in a faded black backpack. He sat forward in his chair, promptly extracted the grade book from its crowded home, and opened it to the class roll for British Literature 201.

Scanning the list to find Jamison's name, Harry glanced across the ledger to see what he already thought to be true: Jamison was borderline B+/A and closer to the A. But Harry disliked pushy students, and would discourage this one accordingly: "Well, the grades you've made in other courses have nothing *whatever* to do with the grade you deserve in *this* course. You understand that, don't you?" He tilted his head toward Jamison.

The young man had lowered his eyes, as if studying his upper lip. His mouth had lifted slightly in a sardonic grin. Harry knew the look: indignant pride barely containing itself. He would wait for an answer before continuing.

When five long seconds had passed, Jamison looked up, his eyes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

squinting and his mouth still smiling bitterly. Before speaking, he leered at Harry for another long second. Harry's heart fluttered with excitement. He hadn't seen such a menacing face in twenty years of teaching.

"I'll put it this way," Jamison said, his voice an articulate growl. "Either you give me the grade I want, or I'll put a stop to you. Do you understand that?" The mouth lost its grin, but the eyes were still blue arrows aimed straight at the wide-opened windows of Harry Peeler's soul.

"Get the hell out of here! Now!" Harry wasn't conscious of having risen from his chair. He stood over Jamison, and he felt his left arm pointing toward the office doorway. He also felt ablaze with heat, and the whole room was white with fire.

Jamison rose slowly, never taking his eyes off Harry. Outside himself, beyond the white flames filling the room, Harry knew a third person was standing at the doorway, watching. But he couldn't think about that. He was about to blast another expulsive command when Jamison suddenly brought a fist down hard onto Harry's desk, making a thunderous thud that reverberated to the base of Harry's spine. "You give me the grade I want," the young man said again, more audibly than before, "or I'll make sure—personally—that you never harass another student."

He was already walking out before Harry could summon his breath. "Get the hell out of here!" he finally managed, as Jamison brushed past Don Elkins and disappeared into the hallway.

Elkins had occupied a next-door office the entire twenty years Harry had been at the university. He was Harry's closest male friend in the department. With eyebrows raised and a downcurling whistle blowing through his lips, Elkins strolled into Harry's office and stopped in front of the desk. "What the hell was that?" he asked, chuckling, his mouth open in sympathetic embarrassment.

Harry was still standing behind his desk. He watched his office slowly return to its natural colors: the muted shades of old textbooks lining his walls, the brighter hues of newer volumes, the copper-stained wall paneling above the bookshelves, a burgundy carpet, an off-black personal computer, the red-cushioned chair where Jamison had sat. Harry looked at Elkins. They were the same age, forty-six, but Elkins appeared much older. Though he was slightly shorter than Harry, he was far heavier, bald on top, and a more conservative dresser. If he didn't often wear a coat and tie, he also avoided Levis and tennis shoes. He was a husband and father, and, fairly or not, to these job assignments Harry attributed his friend's conspicuous middle age.

When Harry didn't answer his friend, Elkins repeated the question: "What the hell was that?" Elkins still gaped with amazement.

"I don't know what that son of a bitch is talking about," Harry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said, still not hearing the question. "I haven't touched a student in ten years at least. Not until the semester is over—that's been my policy for over ten years. That son of a bitch is crazy." Harry looked down, running a hand over the top of his head, feeling the thick crop of hair, still dark brown, give way like a soft brush. He kept his hair short. Students had told him he looked younger that way.

"What about last spring?" Elkins grinned like a co-conspirator.

Harry seemed to realize for the first time that his friend had entered the room. Still thinking about Jamison, he looked again at Elkins. Then, as if by delayed broadcast, he finally heard the query.

"Last spring? No—well, it was the last day of class. They had just written their final paper. Everyone else had left. She had turned in her paper. I didn't even kiss her. All I did was let her know I wanted to. Unmistakably let her know." In spite of himself Harry smiled, remembering that warm afternoon less than a year before. Then he remembered Jamison, who was not a pleasant memory. Elkins, still grinning, shook his head slowly.

It was no trouble to check Jamison's record, to see if he was lying about his grade-point average. Harry suspected he was. Harry took the stairs, as always, to the plaza of McCall Tower, walked to Student Records, got Jamison's transcript, scanned it in the hallway, and saw instantly that Jamison had told the truth. In a two-year undergraduate career, he had nothing to show but A's. Harry was relieved. Maybe it was about grades. Maybe that's all it was.

At home that evening, Harry studied the image in the bathroom mirror. His eyes were a striking slate blue, his other facial features more or less classically formed, except perhaps for a too-thin upper lip. He wasn't as good-looking as he would have liked, but he'd always been pretty well satisfied. The people who knew his age told him he looked ten years younger, and he had to agree with them. He'd realized for some years now that he had a certain boyish charm, and that he always would, even at seventy-five. He wondered sometimes if the boyishness wasn't just emotional immaturity. Deep inside he doubted he could ever marry again, not after his little two-year effort fifteen years before had failed so miserably. No, he doubted he would try that road again, though the alternative prospect sometimes scared him more.

Most of the evening he sat on his couch, alone as usual, grading papers. He'd thought all day about Jamison and about the female students he'd even remotely harassed in the last several years. He remembered three or four in the two years since Jamison had been a student. He hadn't forced himself on any of them. In every case he'd waited until *the last day,* and never—even in the old days—had he so much as considered discussing grades for sex.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That was the point, really: In recent years at least, he wouldn't have needed to, anyway. In recent years, he'd made sure to wait for clear permission before moving in. There was no point trying to find out who knew Jamison and who didn't. More than likely he didn't know any of them; Harry knew his own reputation. Grade-mongers might use any leverage they could. He would just have to wait Jamison out. At any rate, he would give him the grade he deserved.

The next morning Harry stood in the second-floor bathroom of McCall Tower, two minutes before class. He was checking himself in the mirror, mussing his bristled hair—to perfection. He seldom neglected this show-business responsibility, if only because his audience always included girls. He was more nervous than usual, though, worried about seeing Jamison. Like most other A students Harry had seen, Jamison made class attendance a steady habit even if it wasn't an honest passion.

When he walked in, Harry looked instinctively to the back row, to the third seat from the door. He wasn't there. A black pall lifted from the room. Harry thought he might see Jamison anyway, an hour later, in his office, but now at least he might enjoy this last class meeting before the final exam. With a sudden respite, as it were, from ominous circumstances, Harry felt a rush of gladness fill his throat: glad to be teaching at a university, glad to teach a subject he loved, glad he had tried hard, for the most part, to be the best teacher he could. Midst a swelling optimism, Harry decided Jamison meant nothing by his threats, that he was just an overwrought perfectionist having a bad day. If Jamison came to his office again, he would probably apologize to Harry for the tantrum. Harry would accept the apology. He understood pride and ambition well enough. After all, these had been giant motivations in his own career, despite all the romantic opportunities that had presented themselves, quite unforeseeably, on his first entering the ranks of college teaching.

Harry stood behind a long table at the front of the room, surveying the class while removing a textbook and his grade book from the backpack. There was no denying it: The scenery this time of year was exquisite. From now until October most of the girls would be about half dressed: sandals, shorts, and assorted upper pieces often shrinking by summertime to beachwear. In their own way even the few grunge chicks, usually as pretty as normal girls, liked to show what they could, replacing boots with Birkenstocks, leather jackets with gaping smocks, and rolling up their dungarees or swapping them for ratty cutoffs barely clinging to a jutting pelvic bone. The grunge girls never made a play for Harry. Besides being old, he wasn't wild enough. At his age he didn't catch much serious attention from the straight ones either, even if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he did look younger than his years. He still enjoyed looking, though; and there were always a few marginally normal ones out there who simply liked older men, or who tolerated old age because they saw other qualities they liked. Most classes had one or two such girls. This class appeared to have two.

Jennifer Mobley, a petite and pretty brunette, had sat front and center since day one. Her friend Lisa Randolph, a jovial blonde more cute than pretty, sat to Jennifer's left. Both appeared to like Harry very much. Jennifer mostly just stared up at him, smiling sweetly. Lisa liked to ask questions and make funny remarks. She liked to ask Harry what he'd been doing, and she had a running joke with him about Shakespeare. Harry liked Lisa plenty, but he liked Jennifer better. Whenever he bantered with Lisa, he felt Jennifer's dark eyes watching him. Her face drove Harry to distraction. But he was attracted to Lisa too. He would welcome time alone with either of them.

He leaned over the table, checking attendance, still relieved by Jamison's absence. As he placed the lower-case "a" by Jamison's name, Lisa spoke to him: "So what have you been doing?"

"I've been doing my best," Harry said, glancing back and forth between the names in his grade book and the palpable presences, or absences, corresponding to them. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, you know, I reread Shakespeare's plays last night. I can't get enough of him."

"So what did you do the rest of the evening?"

"I wrote a couple of research papers."

"For college credit, or just for fun?"

"For fun." Harry grinned at Lisa, who grinned back. Then he looked at Jennifer, who was grinning too. He told the class to open their books to page 2420, to Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.* Lisa said, "Can't we just watch the video?" Two other students, both males, asked if the class could go outside. Harry remarked that these were excellent questions, and he promised satisfactory answers to them by final-exam time. Throughout his forty-minute lecture he made repeated eye contact with every student. Occasionally he glanced at the floor, at Jennifer Mobley's white sandals. It was a good lecture, and a beautiful time of year. He let the class go two minutes before the bell.

Harry forgot about Jamison until halfway back to his office. He stopped by the mailroom, removed a few pieces of mail from his box, and checked to make sure there was no message from or about Jamison. There wasn't. Then he made his way to room 327, his private sanctuary, made open to the public three hours a week. Harry sat at his desk, took a deep breath, and swiveled toward the window. It was another gorgeous spring day. Spring

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was Harry's favorite season. He loved the smell of the air, the impossibly green grass, the ecstatic songs in every tree. It was the time of year he felt closest to God. It was the time of year he most wanted to marry again. To find a woman he could live with. One woman. A reason not to look at other women. But he could hardly imagine such a woman. If she existed, she wasn't of this world. Maybe in a monastery somewhere, but not here in the world. Only a monastic life could stop his lustful eye. Maybe Jamison knew about his lust. He hoped Jamison would stop by. Maybe they could go drink a beer. They would talk about life, love, literature, and girls. He would explain everything to Jamison, and Jamison would understand perfectly. He hoped Jamison would stop by and give him a chance to explain.

Harry woke with a start. For a moment he didn't know where he was, until he saw the library looming in the near distance. He swiveled in his chair. Jamison was standing in front of his desk. The office door was closed.

"What can I do for you?" asked Harry, sitting back. His stomach was churning.

Jamison looked tired, and Harry remembered the clothes from the day before. The shirt was badly wrinkled. It was solid red except for the words VELVET UNDERGROUND in white block letters across the breast. The letters "VET" were stained brown. In a hoarse voice Jamison asked if he could sit down. Harry motioned toward the vacant chair.

Jamison seemed to relax, his back against that of the chair. Today he looked sad, or confused. To his relief, Harry sensed an apology forthcoming. If he was right, he would tell Jamison, in turn, that he was sorry too. He was sorry that students as bright as Jamison wasted their time worrying about grades, and that there wasn't some other way to earn college degrees than racking up so many grade points for four, six, eight years at a stretch. He was sorry he couldn't guarantee Jamison an A, but he saw no reason why Jamison couldn't get the A he wanted—or "needed"—so badly. Harry leaned forward. He thought he saw a tear leaving Jamison's left eye. He hoped the apology wouldn't get messy.

Jamison cleared his throat. He wiped his eye with the back of his hand. "I'm sorry about all this," he said, looking down. "I really am." Harry felt a smile tugging at his mouth. He could hardly believe the turnabout. Such arrogance one day, and now this. He felt pity for Jamison.

"Let's just forget about it," Harry said, smiling. He longed to say something more comforting, but he feared Jamison might start weeping. He could watch a weeping female, but that was different.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No man-tears, please. Not in this office. "Let's forget all about it," he said again.

Jamison was quiet for half a minute. Harry started twice to say something, but decided to give the young man some time.

"I'm sorry about all this," he said again. "I can't just forget about it. I can't forget what you did. I wish I could."

Harry wasn't sure he heard right. "What did you say?" he asked, his pulse quickening.

Jamison looked remorseful as he spoke, his squinting eyes creasing both temples. His speech was slow and slurred.

"You knew my mother. Twenty years ago. Do you remember Laura Harris?" He paused before adding, "She remembered you."

Harry sat frozen in space. Of course he remembered Laura Harris. He remembered most of his students, no matter their gender, their mediocrity, or their remoteness in time. Harry instantly recalled the long dark hair, the sparkling eyes, and the far-better-than-mediocre intelligence. She had majored in English, after all. Harry had never discriminated against brains, though by no means were they prerequisites. Yes, he remembered everything about Laura Harris. He wanted to tell Jamison how much he'd changed since those early days. But he knew Jamison wasn't finished. He might as well hear him out.

"She told me about it two years ago," Jamison said, "the day before she died." Harry's throat was aching. "She told me what you did that day in your office. In this office, I suppose."

Harry tried to speak. He wanted to explain how things had been, and how they were now. And he wanted to apologize. But his throat had closed tight. He could only listen.

Jamison hadn't looked at Harry yet. When he finally did, his eyes had dried and his voice cleared. His mouth looked bitter as the day before. He leaned forward as he spoke: "You know what happened here, but you don't know what happened after. She was just a pretty piece of flesh to you, but what you did upset her. And she didn't have much room inside for upset—not after her childhood, after the things her father did. You were her favorite teacher, but you couldn't keep your hands off either, and that upset her very much. I guess you didn't know she dropped out of school. You didn't know that, did you?"

Harry didn't know it. All he knew was he had fondled her low back and thigh with his hand, and pressed his leg against hers, during a student conference, a conference she had requested to discuss her 101 essays. She had said nothing when it happened. She hadn't discouraged him at all. Afterwards, despite Harry's invitation, she had not returned to his office. And she ignored him in class. She never spoke to him again, not even on final-exam day when he exchanged goodbyes with most students, but had guiltily

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

let her offer the exchange—or not. She had not. A few days later, in a borderline decision, he had given her an A. She had been the earliest casualty in the first phase of Harry's career, when he occasionally made entirely unsolicited advances. There had been a few other casualties over the years, culminating in the 1989 incident. A report to the English Department changed Harry's method forever. Harry swallowed hard. He was gathering his voice for an apology to Jamison. It was all he could do.

Before Harry could summon the full force of his contrition, Jamison stood up. He was breathing hard through his nostrils, like a simmering bull. Harry thought he might hyperventilate. "She never got over it," Jamison said, doing finger exercises at the ends of dangling arms. "She got married and had me right after she dropped out. Her biggest disappointment in life was not getting a college degree. She said so many times. Then she told me about you, the summer before my freshman year. The summer she died. She wondered if you were still teaching here. She never could come back. She said you killed her momentum." Jamison still breathed hard, and he had teared up again.

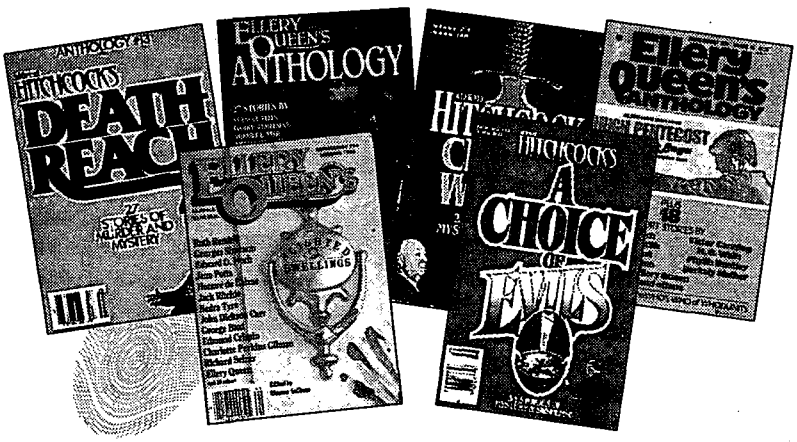
"I'm very, very sorry," Harry said, erect in his chair, sincerely remorseful, and desperate to make amends. He reached for a tissue to hand Jamison. When he offered it, tentatively, Jamison was shaking his head, crying, and his fingers had curled into fists. Before Harry could respond, Jamison was on top of him, driving him backwards in the chair. When it toppled, the two men rolled together onto the floor, with Harry on top. Jamison had his massive hands around Harry's neck and was squeezing hard. Harry couldn't breathe, nor could he loosen the grips on his throat. He tried striking a fist against Jamison's face, but the younger man's arms, fully extended, placed him several inches out of Harry's reach. Harry reached back to his desk, aiming for the letter opener he had never used. It was the first thing he felt. The tissue still clinging to his thumb, Harry grasped the handle of the steel instrument and brought it down hard. It went straight through Jamison's left eye. Jamison screamed horribly, but his hands let go of Harry's neck. The letter opener rested five inches deep in the socket.

Harry stood up, gasping, shuddering. He heard a voice behind him. Don Elkins stood on the other side of Harry's desk. Several other professors had entered too. A few of their students stood gawking in the doorway. Harry looked at Elkins. He looked down at Jamison's hideous head. He looked at Elkins again. He removed the wet tissue from his sweaty hand, letting it fall to the floor. "All I did was touch her," Harry said, pleading with Elkins. "All I did was touch her," he said again, and again, to anyone who would hear. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Match Wits with the

MASTERS OF MURDER



We promise to keep you guessing until the very last page is turned with five classic volumes of our **mystery anthologies.**

Each volume features the very best in murder and mayhem from past issues of *Alfred Hitchcock's* and *Ellery Queen's* mystery magazines. You'll receive more than 140 captivating stories in all, for **just $10.95!**

Penny Marketing
Dept. SM, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

☑ **YES!** Please send me a set of five classic **mystery anthologies** (AHVP05). My payment of $10.95 plus $4 shipping & handling ($14.95 total, U.S. funds) is enclosed.

Name_____
(Please print)

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Please make checks payable to Penny Marketing. Allow 8 weeks for delivery. Outside USA: Add an additional $2 shipping & handling ($16.95 per set, U.S. funds). CT Residents: Pay $15.85 per set to include state sales tax. This offer expires 6/30/00. 049-NMHAL1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Charity with Her Neighbour

David Williams

"Choosing neighbours isn't normally a proposition, Mrs. Rigby. In your situation, it's pretty well impossible, you being the existing resident," the dapper, middle-aged Terence Snell explained with too much finality. Realising this, he compensated by adopting a look of profound concern—though frustration was what he was really feeling. "Naturally I'll do everything I can to help you. But, really, my hands are tied," he completed in the well-bred accent that was a little less contrived than the facial expression. Leaning forward over his desk in the manner of a benign clergyman, he brought his hands together in a prayerful kind of way.

As senior partner of Upshot and Snell, the larger of the two real-estate agencies in the thriving commuter village of Comer, Snell was always at pains to accommodate even the most eccentric

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wishes of the locals. He tried even harder with older locals, whose properties, in the natural order of things, were likely to come on the market sooner rather than later—whether at their owners' instigation or that of their executors. And not to put a finer point on it, Phyllis Rigby was well over ninety.

"My late husband used to say that nothing is impossible until someone else has done it, Mr. Snell, by which time it's too late," the lady responded in a high, even voice, each consonant emerging with exquisite clarity.

The patrician Edith Rigby was a tall, slight, but prepossessing figure, still unbending, with a parched, weather-beaten face, alert, pale blue eyes, and steel-grey hair pulled back tightly into a bun that was presently sheltering under a narrow-brimmed, tip-tilted straw hat. The plucked eyebrows had been replaced with perfectly arched, auburn pencilling, and the thin mouth was just as clearly defined with bold red lipstick. She was wearing a calf-length, short-sleeved lilac silk dress with a pleated skirt, white cotton gloves, and court shoes to match. The dress was now hardly the height of fashion, but it had been three decades earlier when Mrs. Rigby had bought it—at Harrods.

"And your husband was right, Mrs. Rigby, as he so often was. What a brilliant man. And still sorely missed in the community." Snell paused to allow the compliment to be savoured. "The success of this business confirms the very comment you've quoted," he continued confidently, gazing with pride around his private office and absently smoothing a finger across his moustache, while still making up his mind how to cope with a delicate and, if he wasn't careful, promisingly loss-making situation. "I've stopped counting the times we've been told by clients that we've achieved the impossible. But that's why they retain us. To do what others can't. Not surprisingly, we do twice the business of our competitors."

"Indeed, Mr. Snell. Then I still fail to see why you can't make sure that Richmount isn't sold to a Japanese buyer. As I've said, if the opposite should happen, I'd never again be able to sleep in my bed at Foresters."

In which case, dear lady, Snell mused silently, the best course

" 'In Charity With Her Neighbor' is the nearest I've come to a Father Brown crime/parable," said David Williams in his submission letter to *EQMM*, "but the subject seemed appropriate with the Emperor of Japan good-will missioning all over the place." (This was spring of 1998!) Mr. Williams's critically acclaimed books featuring the Welsh policeman Inspector Parry may soon be seen on TV, as they've recently been optioned. ¶

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would be for me to sell up for you, while you move to an expensive retirement home. His more realistic second thought was that if Mrs. Rigby was impelled to move, she'd hardly be likely to have him act for her if he'd been involved in the impelling. That was where the potential loss-making came in.

Richmount was the only property that shared a boundary with Foresters, Mrs. Rigby's own house, which occupied a corner site on the internationally renowned Comer Golf Course Estate—one of the most exclusive residential areas in the English Home Counties.

Set high on its own sloping five acres, Richmount had just been expensively refurbished and enlarged, prior to its being offered for sale with vacant possession.

Mrs. Rigby's Foresters was bounded by roads to the north and west, and by a woodland belt to the south. A smaller building than the neighbouring one, it occupied more land, but, in greater contrast, had been slowly decaying for the quarter of a century since the death of Mrs. Rigby's spouse. When the place eventually changed hands, it would almost certainly be knocked down and rebuilt—but would fetch a handsome price all the same.

The estate agent gave a sickly smile intended to imply the reassurance he couldn't offer in words. "As I said, we've had more than a dozen prospective buyers looking at Richmount, Mrs. Rigby. Naturally a number have been well-to-do people from abroad. Directors of foreign companies working in this country. Comer deservedly gets the pick of such people, of course, being so close to London. . . ." He had intended adding more from his standard sales patter about the attractions of the golf, the frequent train service to London, the relative closeness of the M40 motorway, Heathrow Airport, Windsor, Ascot, and even Oxford, all of them attractive features to a foreign buyer—information Mrs. Rigby knew as well as he did, which was one of the reasons she interrupted him.

"I am not troubled with the numbers of possible buyers, Mr. Rigby. I am deeply concerned that Godlock, my gardener, saw a . . . " She took a long breath . . . "a Japanese couple going over the house yesterday." Mrs. Rigby clutched harder at her white leather handbag, as though there was a sudden and immediate danger of its being snatched from her.

Snell moved uncomfortably in his chair. He knew Godlock, a lazy, gossipy fellow, who was long past retirement age and who spent more time leaning on garden implements than using them, a shortcoming evidenced by the state of the Foresters garden, or what could be seen of it down the overgrown, crumbling driveway. "I believe there was a Japanese couple there yesterday," he offered with calculated vagueness. "Also some Russians, and, the day

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before, an American, as well as two lots of prospective buyers from Hong Kong. . . ."

"Only the Japanese concern me, Mr. Snell," the lady broke in again impatiently. "As neighbours of that . . . of that specific nationality would certainly concern you, if you and your wife had spent three and a half years in Malayan prison camps from nineteen forty-two to nineteen forty-five, as my husband and I did."

"Of course, that must have been a . . . a harrowing experience for you both," the estate agent offered solemnly.

"Harrowing, Mr. Snell? Harrowing?" Mrs. Rigby repeated in a rising, scandalised voice. "It was hell on earth. An experience you can't begin to understand if you didn't go through it. An experience I relive vividly every time I set eyes on . . . on one of those people."

"But nowadays, surely, there are any number of Japanese members of the golf club, Mrs. Rigby?"

"Whom I never see because my trees shield the house and grounds from a view of the course. I presently go about very little, and I've long since given up my club membership," the lady explained shortly, then continued: "It's the prospect of having a Japanese family living next door that fills me with horror. Yes, horror, Mr. Snell. Understand that and you will understand why I am here." A slight tremble went through her body before she added, in a more rational voice: "I am willing to pay you."

There was a moment's silence while Snell dismally reflected on a further disappointment. "You mean if I arrange for the house not to be sold to a Japanese?"

"Certainly. We can call it a consultant's fee. In cash, if you wish. A private arrangement between us." Mrs. Rigby had outlined the somewhat discreditable terms of her offer with an indifference implying that while they were alien to her own standards they probably met Snell's well enough—assuming he possessed standards.

All of which might have constituted a licence for her listener to print money for himself. In fairness, he'd have had scruples about meeting Mrs. Rigby's request, at least in quite the blatant form in which she had put it. But there might have been a creative way around that—if only she had come to him sooner.

He shook his head. "But what you suggest wouldn't be ethical. I'd never do such a thing." Making virtue out of necessity was also part of Snell's stock in trade. But there was no joy in his mouthing what amounted to cant on this occasion.

If only he hadn't promised the property developers who had entrusted him with the sale of Richmount that he could get such a high price for the house. It had been so outrageously high that, despite his bragging, countless viewers had either been frightened

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

off by it or had made offers well below it. The only potential buyer the asking price hadn't fazed was the one who had agreed to accept it the day before, and who had already had his deposit notarised, which legally secured him the property.

The buyer's name was Isamu Nakashima.

"I am quite sure, Sergeant, that the robbery was carried out by the person who moved into Richmount three months ago. Just like the other robbery here last month."

"But Mrs. Rigby, because of your suspicions, we've interviewed Mr. Nakashima twice. Yesterday, and soon after the first robbery," Detective Sergeant Holladay of the Thames Valley CID responded quietly. "It's quite clear he had nothing to do with either burglary."

"He has a wife and three children."

"But they weren't involved either, ma'am. I give you my word on that."

The clean-cut, sports-jacketed, thirty-two-year-old policeman shifted on the cushion under him in a vain attempt to flatten the lump pressing into his upper leg. He stole a further glance around the oak-panelled drawing room, which, like the rest of the house, he found eerie, stifling, and deeply oppressive.

The two were sitting in semi-darkness although it was broad daylight outside. This was because the threadbare brocade curtains at the three pairs of leaded windows were more than half closed. Holladay calculated that moving them might have risked their collapsing onto the furniture below, which included a delicate, inlaid escritoire horribly bleached after exposure there for too many summers. Everywhere there was blemish and decay. An antique chaise longue, under the window closest to him, and covered in what had once been a pink fabric, had the stuffing spewing from its innards in several places. Not that the couch had offered a place to sit, since it was in use as a depository for mounds of yellowing correspondence.

A sizeable, semicircular inlaid side table on Holladay's right was crammed with precious ornaments, including a tall white porcelain bird on a branch, which the policeman was in dread of knocking over. There had been no room there to set anything down, nor was there any on the long low table in front of him, which was stacked haphazardly with more aging documents, books, and magazines with curled-up covers. This was why he was still holding the china cup and saucer he'd been handed. They were doubtless part of a once important set, but with the cup now so stained and cracked he had so far hesitated to put his lips to its contents. Thankfully, Mrs. Rigby had seemed not to notice his abstinence. She was sitting very straight in a parched leather winged chair

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that nearly matched the slightly less worn one he was occupying. He balanced the tea in one hand, with his notebook on his knee, and held both his elbows tightly against his sides.

"Mr. Nakashima is European Chief Executive of the Minato Corporation, Mrs. Rigby," the sergeant continued. "It's a huge outfit. His salary probably runs into . . . into half a million at least. I know your garden statues and your Georgian silver were extremely valuable, but really, he doesn't need to steal things."

Mrs. Rigby gave a bitter smile. "Of course he doesn't. That's not the purpose of the robberies. Any fool can see that. Don't you realise, he's persecuting me? He wants me out of this house. He'll never forgive me for trying to stop him owning Richmount. In the end, you know, I offered to buy it myself, but he wouldn't give up his claim."

Holladay frowned. He'd had it on good authority that the price had been too rich for the lady. "You know, I'm sure you're wrong about Mr. Nakashima, ma'am," he offered. "Incidentally, he told me he came here to see you. That was after the final row you had with him and his lawyer, at the estate agents."

"He told you of that, did he? Hmph."

"Yes. You know, he very much wanted to make things up afterwards."

"Which he could have done by not buying the house."

"Except he'd bought it already by then, ma'am."

"So he and that fool Snell insist."

"We gather that was true, Mrs. Rigby. Anyway, he wanted to be a good neighbour and all that, but . . ."

"But I refused to talk to him. I turned him away at the door. His wife too. She came later." Recalling the episodes seemed to provide the speaker with a good deal of satisfaction.

"They have tried, ma'am." He wondered why he was doing community liaison work when he was paid to investigate crime.

"Correction, Sergeant. They give the appearance of trying. You don't understand the Oriental mind. He lost face when I told him he'd committed an unforgivable error in etiquette by challenging the intention and the veracity of an English widowed lady. Since I wouldn't accept his apology, he has no alternative but to oust me from my home. He wants me out because the sight of me perpetuates his shame."

"From what he and his wife have told me, I can't believe . . ."

"What they've told you is balderdash, Sergeant," Mrs. Rigby broke in. "You realise too that they simply constitute a . . . a vanguard. The Japanese abroad live in tightly knit groups. The Nakashimas are only the first to buy property on the Comer Estate. Others will follow. And the next house they plan to acquire is this one. But over my dead body."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"With respect, ma'am, I'm sure that's wrong. About their trying to get you out, I mean. Mr. Nakashima and his wife impressed on me how keen they are to meld into the community here. They're already active members of the golf club, and the children will be going to local schools in September, after the holidays."

"All a lot of humbug, Sergeant," came the disdainful response. "And do you have any better theory than mine about who's been burgling my house?"

"As a matter of fact, we do, ma'am, and that's really why I'm here. You see, this property is so unprotected by present-day standards."

"I have a burglar alarm," she retorted with spirit.

"But you've told us you never switch it on, ma'am."

The lady lifted her chin. "That's because the wretched thing keeps going wrong. The bell sets itself off for no reason." This time her words sounded more defensive than convincing.

"That's possibly because it's old and, er . . . cumbersome to operate, ma'am. They're much more . . ." he stopped himself from saying foolproof . . . "much more reliable these days."

"So they should be. I'm charged a fortune by the alarm company when they come to reset the thing. That's after it's gone off of its own accord."

The sergeant tutted in apparent sympathy before continuing. "I notice a lot of your boundary-road fencing is broken down, ma'am, and you don't have a gate to the main drive anymore."

"That collapsed with age. In any case, at my time of life, it's far too much bother to open a heavy gate every time I take the car out."

"You could have an electric gate fitted, ma'am. It would stop any vehicle getting onto the property. That puts off a lot of intruders, not having the means of a quick getaway handy, and having to carry the loot any distance."

"An electric gate would be far too expensive."

"The fact remains, ma'am, and without wanting to alarm you in any way, we believe this property may now be well known to a specialist bunch of thieves. The first haul was valuable garden sculpture . . ."

"On which my husband was an expert as well as a collector."

"Indeed, ma'am? Pretty valuable stuff these days, I expect. The second burglary was antique silver."

"Yes. And they only took the best. Like my Georgian tea service. Which is why I'm sorry we're taking tea from an aluminum pot." She nodded at the object which was placed at a drunken angle on a long footstool in front of her. Beside the teapot, and poised quite as unevenly, was a sugar bowl, a slop basin, and a saucer of sliced lemon sections, mostly in unmatching china. The thieves had relieved her of her silver tray as well, and she had baulked at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

using a plastic one from the kitchen for formal entertaining, even for formally entertaining a policeman. In truth, it was a long time since she had offered hospitality to anyone else.

"Excellent tea all the same, ma'am," he said after closing his eyes and risking a gulp of it. "And I gather you have a fine collection of pictures. Well, I can see that from here. Plus a collection of carved ivories."

"They were others of my husband's interests."

"Is that right?"

"And all impossible to insure these days, Sergeant, except at ridiculous premiums. So far, I've been offered derisory sums from the insurance company for my losses. I'm challenging, of course."

"My point, ma'am, is that there may well be more burglary attempts. A lot of professional thieves these days are experts. They take just the things they know have a high value, which they can dispose of quickly through crooked dealers. And they sell information to each other as well. The thieves who took the silver will have noted the other good stuff you have. They may even have taken photos of it, to pass on to mates or dealers who specialise in pictures, ivories . . ."

"So Mr. Nakashima is able to organise an orchestrated stripping of my possessions," she broke in. "Which will probably end up in their attempting to murder me in my bed. I was asleep during the first two raids. Well, let them try me again, and see what they get." The sentence was punctuated by a stiffening of the finely boned jaw.

"It's very unlikely you'll be assaulted by the sort of thieves I'm describing, ma'am. And, I repeat, I'm sure Mr. Nakashima isn't involved."

"I was never burgled before he and his family moved in."

Holladay accepted that the last remark was as lacking in logic as it was impossible to refute. "I gather you don't have anyone living in, ma'am?" he said slowly, trying a new tack. "A housekeeper or a companion?"

"Certainly not. The inconvenience would be unbearable and the cost prohibitive. As it is, I have a daily woman who breaks practically everything she touches. To have someone like her living in the house would ruin me, and cause me great anguish into the bargain." She drank from her cup. "Godlock, my gardener, is here three days every week. The break-ins don't occur in the daytime, no doubt for that reason. But at night, thieves naturally assume everyone in the house would be asleep, and they'd be right. So what would be the point of filling the place with costly staff? And all because of a vendetta against me."

"But you can still do a lot about improving security here, ma'am," the sergeant insisted, purposely not rising to the bait of her last comment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was silence for a moment until Mrs. Rigby offered: "I understand, Sergeant. And I promise I'll look into it." Her tone had become both peremptory and dismissive. She also seemed very tired.

The sergeant left a few minutes later, fairly certain he'd achieved nothing by the visit, just as he was too objective a policeman entirely to place all the onus for that on the old lady. Of course she was being stubborn. He understood her ingrained prejudice against her new neighbours without at all condoning it, and he blamed himself for not being able to persuade her that at her age, and with her relative affluence, the mere cost of home protection should not be the prime consideration. The fact remained, she was a relic of a golden age when gates were ornamental, when front doors, like garages, could be left unlocked, and when a burglar alarm was so unnecessary as to be considered a social-climbing affectation. He had a grandmother nearly as old as Mrs. Rigby who was quite as obstinate, and even more careful with her money—though she had a good deal less of it than the owner of Foresters. The principle was the same, though. They'd both survived the rigours of life in general and of wars in particular with their own ideals intact, and were resentful of the current calamitous drop in moral attitudes.

Nor did Holladay really believe what he had told her about burglars being non-violent, because some were, and some weren't. If she chose to confront one, or more likely two, it was a toss-up how she'd be treated. That was what bothered him most.

It was midnight on Friday, over a week later. Isamu Nakashima was leaning on the balustrade of the balcony to his upper-floor, west-facing study at Richmount. He was wearing an evening dress shirt and trousers, the shirt open at the neck. He had come outside, before turning in, to savour the stillness of the moonlit night and the tranquillity of the country. His wife Michiko had gone straight to bed with a headache on their return from a formal dinner in London an hour before. There had been some paperwork waiting which he'd needed to look over before sending a brief fax to Tokyo. To avoid disturbing Michiko, he was going to sleep in his dressing room.

Everything was as good as it could be for the forty-eight-year-old Mr. Nakashima. The Minato Corporation in Europe was doing well under his management. Michiko and the children, already attuned to life in the UK before they had moved to Comer from the London apartment, were settling down well in the new environment. He was sure rural life was better for the whole family than living in town. As for himself, his golf handicap had come down, he had taken up tennis again, and he swam regularly in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Richmount pool. Nor did he resent the extra weekday travelling. The company headquarters were in northwest London, and to avoid the worst traffic, he needed to leave the house at six, getting back usually around eight at the earliest. But he had a company driver and now did the bulk of his reading in the car. It was all worth it to have the weekends here.

The single local problem, well, the single permanent vexation in Mr. Nakashima's life was Mrs. Rigby, and it irritated him that he still hadn't been able to dismiss it from his consciousness. He actually worried about Mrs. Rigby as much as if she had been his own mother who had died three years before.

Mr. Nakashima looked across Richmount's manicured lawns and borders toward the tree-lined boundary with Foresters, the moon making shadows on the scene like the sun in daytime. He gave an impatient sigh. If only that cantankerous, magnificent, stubborn, splendid old British Empire survivor would see sense. Apart from anything else, at her age, and living alone, she badly needed caring neighbours. And the Nakashimas were ready to be just that. He well understood the root of her problem, but the past was past, and she was denying herself a better present. It wasn't good for her to be alone. He'd gathered from the police sergeant and from older golf-club members that she had no children or other family, and it didn't seem that she had many friends left alive either. In all the weeks they had been neighbours, no member of the family had ever noticed anyone visit the house except tradesmen—never once seen a private car turn into the drive.

But it was while that last thought was still in Mr. Nakashima's mind that a private car did turn into the unobstructed gateway of Foresters. The fleeting look he got of it suggested it might be a four-wheel-drive vehicle: The reflection from side windows meant it couldn't be a van, but it was too high to be a salon car. Curiously, he hadn't heard it approach along the road. Apart from the trees and vegetation that broke up the view, the vehicle was travelling without lights and creeping forward slowly, with no sound of the engine revving. But Mr. Nakashima had sharp eyesight, and he followed the progress between the trees until the moving object disappeared where the drive swung toward the house front.

Two minutes later the strongly built Japanese was himself moving fast on foot up the Foresters drive, a heavy-duty, rubberised flashlight in one hand and a metal golf club in the other. He had delayed only to pull on trainers and to instruct his bleary-eyed wife to call the police.

A Range Rover was parked outside the house, facing down the driveway. Its tailgate was open and Mr. Nakashima could see one large and one small framed oil painting lying on some sheeting inside. As he expected, the front door to the house opened to his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

touch. Stepping inside, he stood still for a moment, eyes closed, acclimatising to the nearly pitch darkness. Soon he could make out a hall with a broad staircase at the rear that seemed to descend directly into a large drawing room, with only an open archway between the two. Then, better able to distinguish obstacles in his path, he moved silently under the arch and into the room that was only a fraction better lit than the hallway.

Two figures with their backs to him, one standing on a chair, were lifting another picture from the wall. As they both turned about, with the heavy frame held between them, Mr. Nakashima switched on his torch, quickly shining the powerful, piercing beam in the eyes of both men in turn. They reacted like dazzled hares.

"Armed police. Freeze," thundered the Japanese in an accent and tone indistinguishable from native English, delivered with convincing inbred authority. "Put the picture against the wall. Now, both of you, on the floor, facedown, arms and legs spread. Do it!"

To his relief, his orders were obeyed to the letter—for the few seconds that elapsed before the scene changed dramatically.

"He's not police. He's by himself. We can take him." The voice had emanated from the middle of the staircase.

Mr. Nakashima swung the torch beam in the direction of the new threat, as, with a deep-throated roar, he launched himself up the steps, golf club poised. But when he and his quarry were two treads apart, the whole area was suddenly flooded with light, and Mrs. Rigby was revealed standing stalwart and imperious above the top step. She was in an ankle-length housecoat, her arms outstretched, with both hands determinedly clasping a service revolver.

Taken off guard by the lights, Mr. Nakashima mistimed the flailing with his makeshift weapon, allowing the third burglar—now solely concerned with escape—to duck and attempt to plunge past him. Except the man tripped over his would-be assailant's foot and grabbed at his shirt to prevent his own fall. The increased momentum carried both figures down the stairs together. To a fresh observer, it just could have seemed that the two were allies who had become accidentally entangled during a hasty flight.

Mrs. Rigby was not only a fresh observer, but also a prejudiced one. "Rob a defenceless woman, would you! Well, take what you deserve. Japanese scum," she cried shrilly, and started shooting. The first two bullets, both aimed at Mr. Nakashima, missed him, the second lodging in his assailant's left buttock as he attempted to rise from the foot of the stairs. But the plucky lady's targeting—or luck—improved with practice, despite the way the gun bucked in her hand with every shot. The third bullet hit her friendly neighbour in the right shoulder as he too was scrambling to his feet.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mrs. Rigby, it's me, Nakashima. Stop shooting," he cried as she aimed at him again.

"I know who it is, you swine. You and your hired underlings," she cried with maniacal intensity, before the gun exploded again. Mrs. Rigby was on a high. This time the bullet narrowly missed Mr. Nakashima's head, ricocheted off a now reverberating copper gong suspended below the stairwell before it homed in the right calf of one of the other two burglars who were now racing for the door. All four of Mrs. Rigby's unwelcome callers were now trying to quit the premises—Mr. Nakashima, mentally as well as physically wounded by her actions, with as much alacrity as the criminals.

It was the leading and so far unscathed burglar who threw open the front door—and promptly hurled himself into the arms of a burly uniformed policeman.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when Mr. Nakashima, patched up and discharged from hospital, had presented himself on the doorstep of Foresters, alongside Sergeant Holladay. Mrs. Rigby had already been interviewed—and rehearsed—by the sergeant, before he had gone to fetch her neighbour.

The drawing room, in which they were now seated, had been very little changed by the night's drama. If anything, its appearance was neater following the attentions of the policemen and women who had descended on the place to collect evidence, and who, before their departure, had tidied up some of the owner's private chaos, believing it might have been made by themselves—or the intruders. Certainly there was more daylight flooding into the room than there had been on the sergeant's previous visit, though the now wide-open window drapes looked even more perilously poised.

"Sergeant Holladay has explained all the circumstances to me, Mr. Nakashima. I'm . . . I'm much obliged to you. Intervening in the way you did was very brave," Mrs. Rigby uttered slowly and precisely, as if each word was being reluctantly squeezed from her body like the last slivers of toothpaste from an as good as spent tube.

"Anyone else would have done the same, Mrs. Rigby," the recipient of this tribute replied politely, twice bowing his head energetically as he spoke. The lady's gratitude was being accepted with more grace than had been entirely discernible in its offering.

Holladay cleared his throat loudly, at the same time fixing Mrs. Rigby with an expectant lift of one eyebrow. This was a reminder that her planned performance was not yet completed.

She met the sergeant's gaze stolidly and smoothed her skirt across her legs with both hands. "I am also very sorry indeed for . . . for shooting you, Mr. Nakashima. Shooting you in error. It was unforgivable on my part," she added, her voice even more strained than before.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Think nothing of it, Mrs. Rigby. In the circumstances, it was a natural mistake. It's only a flesh wound." The speaker had again punctuated his responses with courteous inflections of his head.

"And Mr. Nakashima and his lawyer have told us they won't be bringing charges against you, ma'am, for assault with a deadly weapon," the policeman interposed, with heavy emphasis on his last words. For the old lady's benefit, he had been anxious to have the reprieve on record, and unchallenged. As for the two wounded criminals, they were slightly more incapacitated than Mr. Nakashima, but unlikely to test any judge's sense of common justice by attempting to sue their nonagenarian burgled victim. They had also been made aware that their abjurance in this might earn some mitigation in the matter of their own defenceless wrong-doing.

There remained the fact that the gun had been unregistered as well as unregisterable: Private possession of such firearms was no longer permitted under British law. Even so, the sergeant believed that, in the circumstances, Mrs. Rigby would be let off with a fine and a warning, not the customary jail sentence.

Mrs. Rigby did not verbally acknowledge the news of her alleged good fortune, which, in any case, she regarded merely as her just desert. Any words of gratitude in this context would accordingly have stuck in her throat. Instead, she emulated her neighbour's bowing, but, in her case, with a not very low bow, performed only the once—and stiffly.

"My wife, Michiko, hopes you're recovered from the ordeal, Mrs. Rigby. If there's anything we can do—"

"Please thank your wife for her enquiry. There's nothing . . . " she'd interrupted too soon, and had hesitated because the sergeant had pointedly cleared his throat again. "But if there is anything, I'll let you know," she completed.

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence before Mrs. Rigby, brought up to know it was a hostess's duty to bridge such awkward impasses, enquired, "I understand your home is in Kyoto, Mr. Nakashima? I'm told that is a very historic, sacred city. Is your wife from there too?"

The businessman smiled. "Not from Kyoto, no. Michiko's parents both came from two hundred miles west of Kyoto. From . . . from Hiroshima," he completed quietly.

"Indeed." There was a briefer but decidedly more pregnant silence before Mrs. Rigby asked, this time as if the answer concerned her a little more, "They were not in Hiroshima at . . . at the end of the war?"

"They lived there, yes, but it happened they were away when the bomb was dropped. They were on their honeymoon." He gave a wan smile. "Their own parents were not so lucky. They all died."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Rigby blinked several times. "That was truly devastating for your parents." This was delivered as a statement, not as a question.

"I gather it was. Heartbreaking." Mr. Nakashima looked steadily into the lady's eyes. "But that's a long time ago. Before Michiko and I were born. All is now . . ."

Before he could use the word on his lips, Mrs. Rigby provided it, and again with great certainty: "Forgiven," she said.

"Exactly, Mrs. Rigby." His face and voice livened as he added, "Today we are all good neighbours with our old adversaries, of course."

"Of course." If either of her hearers was expecting an utterance more handsome, he was disappointed. At this point, actions were more expressive than words for Mrs. Rigby, who now looked about in her most majesterial manner. It was as though she intended ordering a servant to do something, then, since there wasn't a servant, she enquired, "Would either of you care for coffee? It would be no trouble."

Both men refused politely and got up to leave. As she offered her hand to her neighbour with no evident hesitation, Mrs. Rigby said: "I shall write to your wife directly, Mr. Nakashima, and invite her to come here with the children for tea on Tuesday. My garden is wilder than yours, but children enjoy that, don't they?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Rigby, I'm sure they'll all be delighted."

The sergeant smiled to himself. He hoped there was an uncracked tea set for treaty-signing occasions. ●

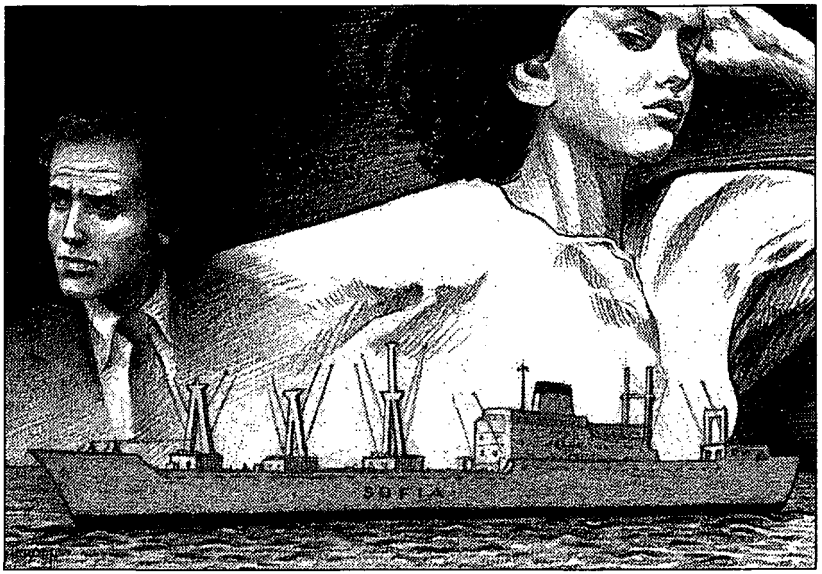
(continued from p.99) interesting to note that years later we tended to think first in terms of who, then of why, and only seldom of how.

. . .Well, nearly a decade passed—from our mid teens to our early twenties—and Manny was graduated from college and went to work writing publicity and ads for a motion-picture company in New York; and I was graduated from the "college of hard knocks" and had risen to the position of copywriter and art director for a New York advertising agency; and one day at lunch we learned of a detective-novel contest co-sponsored by Frederick A. Stokes Company and *McClure's Magazine;* and we entered the contest and our creative energies suddenly exploded, and we . . . took a quantum leap; we won the contest, but before the official announcement could be made, *McClure*'s went into bankruptcy and we lost the first prize; but Stokes published *The Roman Hat Mystery,* and Ellery Queen was born in print.

What happened next? Perhaps *The Greek Coffin Mystery* will be reissued in hardcover on its 50th birthday, and I'll write another introduction and continue the saga of Manny and Danny . . .

Sincerely,
Frederic Dannay August 15, 1978

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Art by Laurie Harden

The Reluctant Op

by Barbara Paul

"Mr. Bass tells me I can't fire you," said Elinor Sykes.

Callie Darrow cracked her gum. "You lead a hard life."

The older woman narrowed her eyes, visibly trying to figure out a way to handle this recalcitrant employee. "Why do you stay here? You don't like the work."

Callie shrugged. "It's a living."

"And a very good one. I've never known Mr. Bass to pay an entry-level salary as high as yours. But then, he isn't the one who has to deal with you on a daily basis."

Big grin. "A real hard life."

"Oh, stop it!" Elinor snapped. "Do you think that's clever? Acting like a smart-mouth adolescent? Grow up, Callie. You have a job to do here, and I'm trying to teach you how to do it."

Callie snorted. *I'm twenty-eight years old, I've done time, and I've outlived two husbands. What are you going to teach me?* "Look, this was supposed to be Tom Ferguson's case. I was assigned to him."

"No, you were not assigned to a detective," Mr. Bass's assistant explained with a show of great patience. "You were assigned to a

©1999 by Barbara Paul

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

case. The case is now being handled by Kevin Craig. Report to him and get your instructions."

"Kevin Craig is a moron."

"Live with it," Elinor said shortly. "If you do not report to Kevin right now, I'm going to inform Mr. Bass that he's paying you for doing nothing. I don't know what kind of bargain you two have, but I do know you're not keeping your end of it. Well? Do I call him?" She reached for the phone on her desk.

"Hell." Callie stood up quickly, trying to knock over her leather chair—but the damned thing was too heavy. "I'm going, I'm going. You got a real knack for blackmail, Elinor." She snatched her backpack up off the floor.

"Thank you," the other woman said coolly.

Callie would have liked to stomp noisily out of the office, but the thick carpet made that impossible; she did manage to slam the door, though. Elinor Sykes was only doing her job; Callie's real enemy here was Mr. High-and-Mighty-Bow-to-Me Bass. Telling herself that didn't help.

Besides which, she couldn't stand Kevin Craig. He was the only one of the detectives at the Bass Agency she wanted to hold by the heels and dip into the Wolfe River. The rest of them were just people, none of them particularly interested in prying into her life. She almost never saw Mr. I-Am-God Bass. But now she was going to have to work with that nitwit Kevin Craig.

The door to his office was standing open. Kevin himself was seated at his desk, facing a semicircle of six chairs crowded close together, one of them empty. The other five were occupied by operatives, all men. The detective's expensive suit and impeccable grooming made the operatives look shabby . . . which they weren't, particularly. Kevin was only a few years older than Callie, but he liked to think of himself as a kewl dude who was more in the know than mere lowly operatives. Which he was, unfortunately. Sometimes.

Kevin looked up and saw her. "Ah, Callie, I've been waiting for you. Close the door, will you?" Not *we've* been waiting for you, she noticed, already in a bad mood.

A prolific mystery writer with more than a dozen novels published in the genre, Barbara Paul has the flexibility to succeed brilliantly in other genres too; most notably, science fiction. Though she now resides in Pittsburgh, she hails from Maysville, Kentucky. You won't find the setting for this new story on any map, however. She penned the tale as part of a project with other writers to construct a completely fictional world. ¶

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Callie closed the door and made her way to the empty chair, careful to avoid any eye contact. She sat and stared at her sneakers, waiting to be told what her next job would be. The man to her left was breathing noisily; asthma, sounded like.

Kevin placed the palms of his hands flat against his desktop. "This is an important case, so I want you to pay careful attention to what I say." All of Kevin's cases were important, to hear him tell it.

"Tail job?" one of the men asked.

Callie looked up to see Kevin's mouth twitch: annoyed at being interrupted. "An especially discreet tail job. Our client is Memotek Systems, and they're convinced they have a smuggler working for them. Recently they developed a new computer chip that was supposed to put the Pentium to shame. But before they'd finished testing, a German firm came out with the same identical chip. Memotek lost the European market . . . much to their relief." He waited for their reaction.

No one said a word.

"Why were they relieved, you ask?" the detective went on imperviously. "Because the chip had a flaw. Memotek's testing procedures uncovered it just days before the German chip appeared on the market. So when the same chip shows up in Europe with the same flaw, the only possible explanation is that Memotek's chip was pirated."

"But now they've licked the problem," one of the operatives said.

The detective glowered at him for stealing his punch line.

"The flaw has been corrected, yes. If Memotek can go into the European market with their superchip and show it works, they'll put the German firm that stole from them out of business. If the new chip isn't smuggled out as well."

"Security at the plant?" someone asked. "Metal detectors?"

Instead of answering directly, Kevin opened the lap drawer of his desk and pulled out a black plastic container about the size of a jeweler's ring box. He opened the container and showed them a microchip smaller around than the tip of a pencil eraser and no thicker than a piece of paper. "This is an early prototype. The finished version is even smaller, I'm told. You see the problem? You could put something that small inside any personal item made of metal and no security check would catch it. The latch of a briefcase, or the handle of a pocket knife. Anything."

The man with asthma was nodding vigorously.

"So you're going to have to be especially sharp-eyed on this job. A thing that small could be exchanged in a handshake." The phone rang; Kevin answered by saying his name and listened. "Yes, she's here . . . all right, yes." He replaced the handset and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smiled nastily at Callie. "Elinor Sykes, checking up on you. Have you been naughty, Callie?"

She went back to staring at her sneakers.

"Memotek's CEO informed me," Kevin continued importantly, "that only six people had access to the flawed chip at the time it must have been smuggled out. And those are the six you're going to follow. You're to stick with your subjects from the time they leave work until they're tucked in for the night. Mr. Bass himself reorganized Memotek's internal security for surveillance during working hours. Write down everything, even when they go to take a leak. I don't want any of these half-assed reports with big gaps of unaccounted-for time. Is that understood?"

No one answered.

"I said, is that understood?"

One of the men cleared his throat. "I don't think any of us here has ever turned in a report like that, Mr. Craig."

"Well, make sure that you don't!" Kevin jerked open a desk drawer and pulled out six large manila envelopes. "Read these before you leave. If there are any questions, ask them now." He distributed the six envelopes.

Callie opened hers and looked at a picture of a smiling, open-faced man in his mid thirties. Hal Stanwyck.

"Oh, Callie," Kevin purred, "your man likes to haunt the waterfront dives during his off-hours. That's your special turf, isn't it? Slums and sailors?"

She cracked her gum.

"I wish you wouldn't do that. Callie, look at me." She raised her head and stared directly at his right earlobe. "I don't want you chewing gum in this office," Kevin said, trying vainly to catch her eye, "and you could do with a little attitude-adjustment if you want to work for me."

The other operatives were pretending not to hear. Callie smiled, keeping her eyes fixed on his earlobe. "I don't mind not working for you."

"You'll do the job you were assigned to!" The earlobe trick was working; he was getting tetchy. From Kevin's point of view, she was facing him and appeared to be looking directly at him . . . but wasn't quite, somehow.

"Whatever you say, Kevin." He liked being called Mr. Craig.

None of them had any questions about their jobs or the people they were to follow. "Then you'd better get started," Kevin said. "Memotek's workday ends at five, and you have to drive out to Gilchrist Road. Callie, check everybody out at the front desk, that's a good girl."

She glared at his earlobe. "Check 'em out yourself, that's a good boy."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kevin sighed. "All these bad vibes today. Callie, I'm asking as a favor. Will you save us a little time and check everyone out? Please?"

Amazing what a little courtesy could do. "Okeydoke."

The six operatives trooped out, the men heading toward the underground parking garage of the Atlantic Building while Callie stopped by the front desk. Behind the desk was a somewhat disturbing presence, a hunk named Julian Woolrich who always made her smile when she saw him.

"Hello, Callie," he said softly, almost intimately. "I hoped you'd be stopping by today."

"Oh? Any special reason?"

"I just like seeing you, that's all."

Right answer. Callie glanced over at the security guard also seated behind the semicircular desk: He was watching a bank of monitors and paying no attention to Callie and Julian. But she didn't follow through on the opening, tempting though it was; even hunks had to be kept at a distance if they worked at this place. Callie told him what she and the other five operatives would be doing.

"Let me check these names." Julian read them back to her from the list he'd made.

"Right. And none of us is to be called after five P.M.—be sure to make a note of that, will you?"

Julian dutifully wrote it down. "May I ask why?"

Callie blinked. "Because it's kind of hard to tail a guy unnoticed when your cell phone keeps ringing."

He nodded, made a further note. "Yes, I see. I believe someone mentioned that before."

"And Julian, check us out every day at five until Kevin Craig or I tell you otherwise."

"Got it. Checked out every day at five until further notice, and no phone calls."

"No phone calls *after five.*"

"Ah . . . yes, after five. That's while you're actually on surveillance, right?"

"That's right." She smiled a regretful goodbye and headed toward the elevator. Gawjus man, Julian Woolrich, but a bit of a dim bulb.

The first thing Callie did in the parking garage was get rid of her gum. No need to keep up the unreachable-adolescent act here.

When she got to Gilchrist Road, she could spot only two of the other operatives. One was parked on the shoulder almost directly across the road from the main entrance to the Memotek industrial park. He was leaning against his car, smoking a cigarette, looking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for all the world like a man waiting to give someone a ride home from work. The asthmatic man was parked a little farther along the road, facing town, pretending to read a newspaper. Callie shook her head. Man in a car holding a newspaper up in front of his face—it could only be a cop or a private. Dead giveaway.

She discovered a service road opposite Memotek and followed it to the top of a small rise . . . where she found the other three operatives; they grinned and waved as she braked hurriedly. A good spot. It was difficult to identify someone in a moving car, especially if you'd never seen that person in the flesh before. You needed to be practically on top of the car, as the operative smoking the cigarette would be. Or you needed a good pair of binoculars. Callie took hers out of her backpack and joined her fellow ops.

A few minutes after five, the cars started streaming out. They had only one chance at spotting their subjects, at the very moment the cars drove through the gates. Once they made the turn onto Gilchrist, the angle was wrong for seeing who was inside. Callie concentrated hard on finding the recently memorized face of Hal Stanwyck.

He didn't come out until almost six, but he was still the first of the suspects to leave. These people must love their work, Callie thought as she jumped into her car and started down the rise after Stanwyck. She picked up his black BMW and dropped back to let another car pull in between them.

Stanwyck followed Gilchrist only to the turnoff south to Riverview Parkway. Not going home, then; Stanwyck lived in the Strawberry Hill section of town, north of Clement. Yupsville. Parkway traffic was heavy this time of day; Callie had to concentrate on not losing the BMW. When Stanwyck drove past the Seneca Street Bridge without turning, her heart sank. He was headed toward the waterfront.

When Callie first started working for Mr. Kiss-My-Ass Bass, he'd informed all his detectives that she knew the waterfront area like the back of her hand. But so far her excursions into the area had been brief—in and out with no harm done. Only Bass understood the risks she ran returning to the area where she'd spent most of her life, but that devil couldn't care less. He wanted her knowledge of its warren of back streets and her contacts with the army of thieves and grifters and pushers and hustlers who operated there. The fact that he was putting her into the greatest danger of her life didn't bother him a bit.

For a moment, Callie gave in to a loathing so intense that it blinded her; she didn't see Stanwyck turn north onto Front Street. But she made the turn automatically; the alternative was to drive into the Atlantic Ocean. There he was, dawdling along.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Traffic never moved fast on Front Street; there wasn't room, for one thing. The street had been widened a couple of times, but it couldn't keep up with the amount of commercial traffic generated by all the piers jutting out into the ocean. Callie looked at the ships docked there; she'd always liked watching them loading and unloading, ever since she was a kid. She sniffed the salty tang of the water with pleasure. It was cool here, by the ocean, even for June.

Stanwyck had a goal in mind; he drove purposefully without any neck-craning or gawking. Callie followed him almost all the way to the north shore. Ah. He was going to the Sea King.

The pricey restaurant was built on a cliff overlooking the water. The building itself was wide and shallow with a glass wall facing the sea. Immediately below the building were four tiers of terraces, already beginning to fill up with evening diners. Every seat in the Sea King offered a breathtaking view of the harbor.

Callie pulled into a small gravel parking area between a photo shop and a drugstore. Through her binoculars she watched Stanwyck come down and take a table on the third terrace, martini glass in hand. He was carrying a little more weight than his picture indicated, and his movements weren't particularly graceful. A waiter appeared and Stanwyck ordered from the menu. Great.

She found a burger joint a couple of blocks away and bought her dinner. She took the greasy bag to a cement bench at the land end of a small pier that had only a sailboat tied down there for the night. A quick check through the binocs: Stanwyck was still alone. Not meeting anyone, then.

The summer sun was only beginning to set behind her back; the water appeared gray with golden highlights, constantly moving and changing. There was still plenty of light for Callie to study more carefully the dossier that Kevin Craig had provided. Hal Stanwyck was thirty-three, a boy-genius type who was born understanding computers and who'd made it all the way to adulthood without once getting busted for destructive hacking. MIT, IBM, lured to Memotek four years ago, salary and options increased every year since. Nice face—friendly-looking. Married once, for . . . oh-oh, for only seven months. Not a loner, though. Stanwyck just enjoyed being a man in his prime, on the prowl, and with money in his pocket.

He was alone tonight, though. It was after eight when he finally rose from his table. Callie was in her car waiting for him when he drove down from the Sea King parking lot. *Go home,* she commanded.

No such luck. He drove back to the heavily commercial area of the waterfront, past the Harbor Patrol station and the loading cranes and the ships' chandlers and the fish market, now closed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the night. Stanwyck turned off Front Street and left his car in a high-rise garage on Mitchum next to the dockworkers' union hall. Callie parked in an alley with a slight feeling of relief. It was easier to tail someone on foot in the waterfront district, and yups like Hal Stanwyck normally didn't venture too far into the interior. It ought to be all right.

This time he had no specific destination in mind. He just wandered, looking. The waterfront district was as safe as any place in Port Wolfe could reasonably be, as long as you stuck fairly close to the shoreline. Past Third Street, though, running parallel to Front, you might as well wear a sign saying "Victim." The streets back there were dark, narrow, and twisty, sometimes changing their names for no discernible reason . . . those that had names. Some of the alleys were wider than the streets, the ones that backed on warehouses equipped with loading docks. It was an easy place to get lost in.

Stanwyck had stopped in front of a porno house. He looked at the photos on display and exchanged a few words and a laugh with the street shill urging him to buy an hour of Paradise. "Live Acts!" the pink neon screamed. Callie leaned against a utility pole and gaped. Before she'd gone into prison, that building had housed an outfit that provided laundry services for ships in the harbor. They were right on Third Street, the unofficial dividing line between normal and ghetto. She'd never seen a porn palace this close to the shore before. What else had changed while she was away?

Happy Hal bought a ticket and went in. Callie looked around for a place to perch.

Across the street was Salvatore's Tattoo Parlor. Sal Gagliardo wasn't a bad guy, but he was one of those people she'd be better off avoiding. Still, he wouldn't think anything of it if she went in and sat for an hour. She wondered if his mother was still alive.

She was. A bell tinkled when Callie pushed open the door. Ever since his wife died, Sal had lived with his mother behind the shop. But right then, Mrs. Gagliardo was seated in her usual chair, nodding, unaware of their visitor. The old woman had been hard of hearing and intermittently senile the last time Callie had seen her.

"Be right with you," Sal said without looking up. He was working on a bikini-clad girl who couldn't have been more than fourteen or fifteen, tattooing a sprig of cherries high on her inner thigh.

Another girl was watching. "Ooh, way cool! Looks shrewd, Brittany!"

"Yeah? I wanna see. Gimme a mirror."

"In a sec," Sal said. "Almost done."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He finished up and handed them a mirror. The two girls giggled at the reflection of Brittany's crotch, but they agreed the cherries were hot stuff. The second girl paid Sal while Brittany slipped a dress twenty years too old for her on over her bikini. "Show your friends," Sal said with a crooked smile. They left, chattering happily and banging the door after them.

The banging door woke up old Mrs. Gagliardo; she muttered something and made a birdlike movement with her hands. Her son turned to Callie and said, "Now, what can I do for you?"

"Hello, Sal."

His eyebrows rose. "Callie? Is that you?"

"It's me."

"Hey, I heard you were out. Come here, girl!" Callie went over for her hug. "Hey, Mama!" Sal shouted. "Look who's here! It's Callie Darrow!"

"Who is it?" the old woman asked.

Sal shouted even louder. "Callie Darrow! You remember Birdie's girl, don't you?"

Birdie's girl. Callie yelled, "Nice to see you again, Mrs. Gagliardo!"

"Birdie's girl?" The old woman reached a shaky hand out to her. "Why, hello, Callie. I haven't seen you in the longest time!"

So she did remember. "I've been away," Callie shouted.

Sal got them all coffee while Callie settled into a lumpy upholstered armchair that had a thin disguising afghan thrown over it. By dipping her head a little, Callie could peer through the lettering stenciled on the front glass and get a clear view of the porno house. It called itself The Garden of Eden, and one life-sized poster by the doorway did show a man and a woman wearing fig leaves.

"So, Callie." Sal took a swallow of coffee. "Got anything going?"

Here it was. "Nothing major. I need to get reoriented first." She jerked a thumb toward the window front. "That place across the street. What happened to the laundry?"

"Folded." He grinned at his own weak joke, then turned serious. "Not enough demand for what they supplied. All the new ships have onboard laundries. Only old tramp steamers and like that need a shore laundry now, and there ain't many of them left."

Callie sighed. "That big old laundry was there since before I was born."

"Yeah, it's a shame."

Mrs. Gagliardo said, "This is too hot." Her son carefully removed the coffee cup from her frail fingers and set it on the small desk next to her. "Let it cool a little." He looked at Callie. "Guy I know's lookin' for a bonnet."

A female decoy. "When?"

"Friday, around noon."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Callie shook her head. "That's when I report to my probation officer."

Mrs. Gagliardo's body jerked. "Oh! I can't sleep at night and keep drifting off."

Callie grinned. "Happens to me, too, sometimes."

The old woman leaned toward her. "How's your mama, Callie? Is she over her cold yet?"

Callie and Sal exchanged a glance. Sal shouted, "Mama, Birdie died a long time ago. Callie was still a kid. You remember."

"Oh." The old woman looked confused.

The door opened and a sailor and his girl came in, laughing and flirting. He wanted her name tattooed over his heart.

While Sal tended to his customer, Callie stared through the glass at The Garden of Eden across the street. That was one reason she wanted to leave Port Wolfe. Here, she would always, always be Birdie's girl.

Callie had been a thief and a con artist as long as she could remember. Her first lessons had come from her mother, who taught her to slip quietly into her bedroom while she was entertaining and remove cash from the john's billfold—not all of it, just enough that he wouldn't know immediately he'd been ripped off. Callie was a quick learner, finding ways on the street to bring home a little extra money. Birdie's girl was known as a kid who could be trusted to deliver a message, lift a set of keys, finger a likely mark.

Birdie Darrow told people she was a singer . . . and she did sing, sometimes, whenever she could find a dive that would hire her for a night or two. But she wasn't very good; even her young daughter could tell that. Callie often wondered whether Birdie had ever planned to teach her the tricks of that other profession she practiced, the one that kept the two of them clothed and fed. It was something she would never know. When she was eleven, Callie had watched, traumatized, as a drunken john beat her mother to death.

Callie had been put into the city's foster-care program, which meant she grew to adulthood with virtually no supervision at all. To the various families to which she was sent, she meant an extra check in the mail every month, nothing more. So she'd built her own life, among her own kind. And like all thieves, she looked upon the straights as a bunch of fools.

Until she'd been caught.

Callie was no stranger to the inside of various juvie detention centers, but that was when she was still green and learning; never before had she done serious time. But during those endless days in prison, Callie had finally stopped hating her mother. Birdie had done the best she could; she didn't know any other way to live. She'd taught her illegitimate daughter everything she knew about how to survive. Unfortunately, it hadn't been enough. For either of them.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sal finished with the sailor, whose girl was properly awestruck at seeing her name over his heart. Sal collected his money and hurried them out. "Show your friends," he said automatically.

Mrs. Gagliardo let out a soft snore.

Sal plopped down in his chair and looked at Callie. "Know another guy needs a driver."

She couldn't get away with ducking out twice. "I got a car," she said quickly.

"False plates?"

"Out-of-state. When's this one?"

"Thursday night." Sal went over to the small desk and pawed through a drawer until he came up with an index card with a phone number written on it. "Ask for Mario."

Callie slipped the card into a back pocket of her jeans, knowing not to ask questions. "Thanks, Sal."

"And yes, you can stay here until he comes out."

"Who?"

"The mark you're waiting for. Garden of Eden."

She laughed shortly. "Rusty."

"Naw, you hid it pretty good. You forget I've known you all your life."

Sal was the biggest gossip on the waterfront. Callie didn't have to feign an interest as she caught up on who was running what scam, who was doing time, who had dropped out of sight. Which new cops to watch out for and which were willing to do a little business. Then out of the corner of her eye she caught movement across the street. "There's my mark." She stood up and glanced at the old woman asleep in the chair. "Tell your mama I said goodbye."

Sal nodded and waved her out.

Hal Stanwyck's sojourn in The Garden of Eden had left him thirsty; he headed straight for Chez Stinky, a dive three blocks away. Callie followed him in; it was a good place to pass on a smuggled chip, as Stinky didn't believe in bright lights. She thought the place had changed its decor from the last time she'd seen it, but she couldn't be sure in that half-light.

Chez Stinky was a skinny rectangle, narrow and deep. Callie had to walk right past where Stanwyck was sitting at the bar to reach the tables in the back. She took one, in shadow against the wall, that gave her a good view of the bar, one of only two tables not occupied. Hal Stanwyck wasn't acting like a man waiting to meet someone—no looking around, no consulting his watch.

When Callie pulled the billfold from her back pocket to pay for the drink she'd ordered, she also pulled out the index card Sal Gagliardo had given her. She wouldn't call this Mario, whoever he was, but she wouldn't throw away his number, either. A contact

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a contact. And that's what Mr. Upright-Citizen Bass was paying her for, her contacts.

Again it came, that wave of hatred that blinded and incapacitated her. She fought it off with an effort and gave in to a moment of despair. Was it always going to be like this? Instant paralysis every time she thought of the man?

Hal Stanwyck got up from the bar and went to the Gents. Callie gave a mental cheer; she'd been feeling the need herself. On her way to the Ladies, she passed a table where two couples were sitting and laughing. One of the men had taken off his jacket and draped it over the back of his chair, leaving his billfold in the jacket pocket, the stupid jerk. Just by flexing her knees slightly, Callie was able to lift the billfold without even breaking stride.

Inside one of the stalls in the Ladies, she examined her pickings. Over three hundred in twenty-dollar bills plus a few ones. But the plastic the jerk carried was worth ten times that.

Who was fencing credit cards now? The last she heard—Callie broke off her line of thought, appalled. My God. *That easily.* That easily, she'd slipped right back into her old pattern. She gritted her teeth and squeezed the billfold with both hands as hard as she could. Strangling temptation.

When she'd recovered her composure, she left the Ladies and on the way to her table slipped the jerk's billfold back into his jacket pocket, keeping a couple of the twenties for her trouble.

Hal Stanwyck was already back in his place at the bar. Callie settled down to wait.

A young couple at the next table started quarreling loudly. Callie shrank back against the wall as customers at the bar started craning back to see what the ruckus was. But Stanwyck wasn't one of them; he sat staring into his glass, oblivious to everything around him. Callie relaxed a little and shot a dirty look at the noisy couple at the next table.

And got a shock: The man looked disturbingly like Billy. A little older, but they could have been brothers. Billy, sweet Billy, whom Callie had married when she was not yet eighteen and he only a year older. The quarreling couple got up from their table to leave. Callie watched them until they went through the door and disappeared. Which was very much what she would have liked to do herself.

She'd turned a sort of corner in prison. One day, after an especially humiliating full-body search for drugs, Callie had taken an honest look at herself for the first time in her life. She was supposed to be in her prime, but look at her! Locked up as felon, owning nothing . . . the food she ate and the very clothes on her back were paid for by the state. She was alone—no family or friends. Callie Darrow didn't have friends; she had contacts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The conclusion was obvious: If the way she'd been living wasn't working, then find a different way. The idea of living life as a straight so bemused and disturbed Callie that it was three or four days before she could settle down to making plans. It wouldn't be easy. She had no marketable skills, no work record. She'd never paid income tax. She didn't even have a Social Security card.

She could say she was born in Port Wolfe but lived most of her adult life in Australia, until her husband died—that would account for her lack of a work history. It would not account for her American speech. Oh, this could be tricky! But it was doable, Callie felt. There was much to be taken care of. She was surprised to find that her days in prison had suddenly become bearable, now that she had a plan.

A major part of that plan was getting away from Port Wolfe. It might mean violating her parole, if she ever got parole. But her best chance for survival lay in disappearing from Port Wolfe forever. Too many people knew her, knew what she did. There were too many traps for her here . . . and too many temptations. Callie wasn't sure of her ability to stop being a thief. But she was sure of her determination to try. A fresh start, where no one knew her. She started daydreaming about where she'd like to live. Someplace clear on the other side of the country. San Francisco sounded good.

Then the day finally came when that iron door clanged shut behind her. She was wearing a cheap prison-issue suit and blouse, and she had only a few bucks in her dime-store handbag—but she was free. *San Francisco, here I come!*

But a man had been waiting for her . . . silver-haired, shrewd-looking, with a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. Standing by his car parked near the prison entrance, he'd said he ran a detective agency and was there to offer her a job. Sam Bass was having trouble finding women operatives who could go into the dangerous parts of town without drawing attention to themselves. His background check on her told him she could blend into the waterfront district as well as anyone, and it was that ability that he wanted to hire.

Callie declined, emphatically. He insisted. Callie told him to get lost. He told her he had evidence she had driven the getaway car during the robbery of a pawnshop in which the owner had been killed.

That stopped her cold. The pawnshop job was supposed to be a quickie—in and out, no trouble. She'd driven a rental car for two guys named Marty and Jangles that she'd worked with before. They both carried guns but were kind of proud of the fact that they'd never had to use them. *We're so tough, we don't need to shoot nobody.* But the old man in the pawnshop had surprised

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them; instead of meekly handing over his stash, he'd pulled out a shotgun and pointed it straight at Marty. Marty shot him.

Those two idiots hadn't even spotted the surveillance camera when they cased the place. Marty and Jangles had been caught, but neither one of them turned over on Callie. If they had, she would have been tried right along with them. The law said a murder occurring during the commission of a felony was chargeable to all participating in that felony. Callie hadn't even set foot inside the pawnshop; but in the eyes of the law, she was as guilty of that old man's death as if she'd pulled the trigger herself.

Callie demanded to see Bass's evidence.

He'd showed her a photocopy of a letter Jangles had written to his brother from prison. "Me and Marty ran out of luck," he'd said, "but Callie got away." Bass wouldn't say how he got the letter, but instead pointed out that there weren't all that many Callies in Port Wolfe in her particular profession. She hadn't been hard to track down.

Next he'd handed her an enlarged copy of her police mug shot—how had he gotten hold of that? It was the only photograph of Callie in existence. Bass waited while she read a signed statement by a clerk at the car rental; he named the woman in the photo as the one who'd rented the Ford the police had been able to identify as the "escape vehicle." The phony ID she'd used couldn't protect her from eyewitness testimony.

Bass had raised an eyebrow and pointed back toward the prison door she'd just walked through. So there it was. She either went to work for him, or she went back inside.

Callie didn't plead. She knew it would do no good, and she was too proud to plead anyway. There was nothing she could do to stop him. Bass was going to force her back into the very environment that had made her what she was, the environment she so desperately wanted to escape.

She'd never been owned before. In both her marriages she'd stayed her own woman. Even in prison she'd remained remote, avoiding alliances with the other prisoners and enduring what was, after all, only a temporary setback. Never before had her life been under the total control of another person.

"I'll find a way," Callie whispered, staring at Hal Stanwyck sitting at the bar. "Somehow I'll get you, Sam Bass." She smiled at the melodramatic sound of that, but her resolution didn't waver. She would get him. Somehow.

"And that's it?" Kevin Craig asked. "Eat, drink, and be merry?"

"That's it," Callie replied. "Dinner at a harbor restaurant, followed by a couple of hours of entertainment and then home. Monday, when he was alone, the porn palace. Tuesday, a buddy from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the office came with him and they spent the evening bar-hopping. Wednesday, he took a date dancing at The Lotus House. But no all-night binges or secret meetings or anything."

"Damn." Kevin scowled until he remembered he didn't look good scowling. "Hal Stanwyck's our best bet."

"He is? How?"

"Passed over at Memotek. Big project coming up that he wanted to head. He's the only one of the six possibles with reason to bear a grudge against the company."

"He doesn't act like a man with a grudge."

"Well, he wouldn't, would he?" Kevin snapped. "Thieves don't advertise that they're thieves."

Not if we can help it, Callie thought. "So what do you want me to do?"

"Stick with him. Maybe something will break over the weekend. You don't mind a little overtime, do you?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"No. And Callie . . . stay sharp."

She nodded and left.

That night Hal Stanwyck was alone again.

Callie decided to try something she'd been thinking of, a little close-in investigating that Kevin Craig would have her boiled in oil for if he knew about it. Operatives were not only supposed to *be* invisible, they were supposed to *stay* invisible. But tonight Callie was going to go visible. She wanted to meet this man she'd been following for four nights. Big no-no for operatives. Mr. Do-Everything-My-Way Bass would pee his pants.

Stanwyck had varied his routine slightly this time. Instead of lingering over a leisurely dinner as usual, he'd wolfed down his food at the Ocean View restaurant and headed straight for Chez Stinky, where he seemed settled in for an evening of heavy drinking. He looked depressed. Bad day at work? Last night's date said no? Depressed people often wanted to be left alone. But it could mean he was vulnerable . . . and approachable?

Callie backed her car into an alley that caught some of the illumination of a street lamp, but she took a flashlight and checked the part that dead-ended against a grimy brick wall. No bums sleeping among the garbage bags. With the lid of the trunk up, she was hidden from the street but still had enough light to see by.

She stripped down to her panties, tossing jeans, shirt, bra, and sneakers into the trunk. She opened one of the boxes of spare outfits she kept in the car, a habit left over from her earlier profession. On with the short skirt and low-heeled dress shoes. A sleeveless top that left her midriff bare. Money and a few odds and ends moved from the backpack to black match-everything purse. A small roll of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cotton under her upper lip to give her mouth a pouty look. Bright red lipstick, which she hated. Finally she tucked her mouse-colored hair under a blond wig and added a pair of lightly tinted glasses. Even Sal Gagliardo wouldn't know her in that get-up.

She slammed the trunk lid shut and was starting out of the alley when she heard the sound of faint applause. After a moment she spotted an old man leaning on the sill of a high second-story window. "Thank you very much, girlie," he said. Callie laughed and went her way.

Hal Stanwyck was seated at one end of the bar in Chez Stinky, staring at a muted ball game on the TV. Callie took a seat two stools away and ordered a bourbon on the rocks. The barman tried to strike up a conversation but she cut him short. She lit a cigarette and turned to Stanwyck. "Darlin', you look like you're carryin' the weight of the world on your shoulders, but could you manage to pass me that ashtray? Unless you're plannin' on usin' it?"

Stanwyck came to with a start and pushed the ashtray toward her. "No, I don't smoke."

Not much of an opening. "I didn't either, last week," she said with a sigh. "I've quit three times now."

"And started again three times."

"You got it." Aha, he was cooperating. "I'm thinkin' about gettin' one of those patches."

The talk proceeded—tentative, man/woman pickup talk—until they reached the point Callie could ask him why he was so gloomy.

That's all it took.

The gates opened and the complaints came flooding out. It was his work: He was surrounded by talentless dorks, he had to take orders from people less intelligent than he, he had to *give* orders to spaceheads who were constitutionally incapable of following even the simplest directions. Every time he came up with a new systems modification, he had to get his work plans notarized to keep his ideas from being stolen. No one appreciated his contributions. His bosses took him for granted.

Callie listened carefully, but could hear nothing but just another guy bitching about his job. If Stanwyck had indeed smuggled out the earlier chip, she was willing to bet it was the first time he'd ever done anything like that. This guy was no pro. He told too much about himself.

Finally he stopped for breath. "By the way, my name's Hal." He stuck out a hand.

She shook his hand. "Carolyn."

"Carolyn, do you have anything planned tonight?" He held on to her hand. "Let's go someplace else. This joint's getting too noisy."

"Yeah, it is, isn't it? Okay . . . where we goin'?"

They went to four other places. Hal was restless, unable to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

settle. And he talked compulsively, about all the things that were wrong in his life. It didn't take long for the talking to turn into just plain bellyaching. Callie began to see why his marriage had lasted only seven months. That woman must have been a saint; Callie had had enough after seven minutes.

"Randall has the most selective memory of anyone I know," Hal complained bitterly. Randall was the vice president he reported to. "He remembers only those things that make him look good. The first whiff of trouble, he doesn't remember the conversation, he doesn't remember seeing your memo. He just laughs and says, 'Oh well, you know my memory!' He's so damned transparent about it—and everyone lets him get away with it!"

Not once did he ask "Carolyn" anything about herself, what she did for a living, how she came to be at Chez Stinky. Callie had a cover story all made up that she never got to use. His only interest in her was as an audience.

She considered him carefully. A little on the plump side, but nice-looking. Successful. Gifted in a high-profile profession. And what was he? A whiner, totally self-absorbed. And feeling unappreciated.

Yep. Mr. Hal Stanwyck was a good candidate for the role of chip-smuggler.

Callie finally put an end to it by pleading the need to get up early for work the next day.

At noon on Friday Callie made her weekly trudge down to Civic Plaza, a copious open space dominated by the new police headquarters building on the west side—all glass and steel and sharp angles. It stood in sharp contrast to the city jail off to one side, an elderly, patched-together structure where Callie had been held during her trial. Civic Plaza was surrounded by office buildings; walk away in any direction and you'd bump into a lawyer before you'd gone ten feet.

Callie's destination was a graceful old building directly across the plaza from police headquarters; it had some fancy new name now, but everyone still called it the old county courthouse. The building was rundown, because the city didn't have the funds to maintain it properly. But it was earning its keep, housing overflow city, county, and state offices until it was straining at the seams.

The whole first floor of the county courthouse was given over to the Welfare Department. Callie rode the elevator up past the second floor (Motor Vehicles Bureau, City Parks Authority) and got off on the third. In their collective wisdom, the planners of the new police headquarters building had neglected to allow room for the parole department.

Mr. Leave-It-to-Me Bass had signed papers saying that Callie was working at the Bass Agency as a mail clerk. Parolees were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not allowed to associate with known criminals, but operatives were often in contact with "undesirables"—an unavoidable circumstance that would have the parole department screaming bloody murder. Callie was glad of the fiction; it made her weekly check-ins relatively free of hassle. She had no problem acting the honest citizen; it was a role she'd played in many of her scams. What's more, she even had a Social Security number now.

Callie's parole officer was a fortyish woman named Rosemary Barnes who thought of herself as Friend and Advisor Extraordinaire to all her charges. Most parole officers checked you in and out as fast as they could; it was the only way they could keep up with their caseloads. But Rosemary Barnes always took time to add A Personal Touch.

Today she folded her hands on her desk and leaned forward toward Case #19Y-645311A. "Tell me, Callie," she said in a tone meant to invite confidences, "do you like working at the Bass Agency?"

Callie shrugged. "It's all right."

"But do you *enjoy* your work?"

Make it real. "It's boring. Sorting the mail, pushing that damned cart around."

The friendly voice now contained a hint of reprimand. "You aren't thinking of quitting, are you?"

"To do what? I got no place else to go."

That was the right answer; the Rosemary woman smiled smugly and nodded. "You know, Callie, you're a bright girl. You could go far in office work if you put your mind to it. Have you ever thought of taking night classes to learn shorthand and word processing?"

"No," Callie said truthfully.

"Then perhaps you should. Employers watch to see which of their employees are working at improving their skills. Secretarial training—that's the way to advancement!"

Callie blinked. "I'll think about it."

That was all Rosemary Barnes needed to hear. "There are a number of business colleges in Port Wolfe with full curricula for night students. Why don't you check into a few of them?" She took Callie's mumble for assent and told her that would be all for this time. As Callie left, the probation officer was making a note in a folder, good deed done for the day.

Callie drove through the old Colonial section of Port Wolfe where she rented an apartment in a restored three-story building but didn't stop. Nor did she stop at the Atlantic Building on the corner of Hawthorne and Seneca; no need to check in at the Bass Agency. She took the bridge to the northern part of town and looked for an eatery on Seneca.

Callie liked Seneca Street. It was a long commercial street run-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ning north-south through town, crossing the Wolfe River. To the immediate east of Seneca were the slums that formed the inland part of the waterfront district. To the west were a number of neighborhoods undergoing facelifts and filled with overpriced condos and townhouses. The most posh of those regenerated neighborhoods was Strawberry Hill, where Hal Stanwyck lived. Seneca Street, dividing the two extremes of slums and upwardly mobile, partook of both elements. A cheap liquor store right next to a place selling imported lighting fixtures, a junky souvenir shop across the street from a ritzy jeweler's establishment. Callie found a soup-and-salad place that played videos on the walls and went in.

She lingered over her lunch, killing time. Unless Sal Gagliardo had changed his routine, he wouldn't open up his tattoo parlor until midafternoon. Callie had a little protect-your-ass work to do. If Sal ever suspected that she had joined the straights and was in fact spying for them, he and her other old cronies would toss her off Front Street Bridge without a second thought. Sal was a good guy only up to a point.

Daytime traffic on the waterfront was murder, so she left the car on Seneca and took a bus down to Third Street. She was early, but she had to wait only ten minutes until Sal was open for business.

Callie went charging in, breathing fire, secretly relieved that Sal's elderly mother was nowhere in sight. "Thursday night, Sal," she said angrily. "That's what you told me. Your buddy Mario needed a driver Thursday night."

"Callie?" he said, surprised. "What—"

"You know what today is, Sal?" she plowed on. "It's Friday. The day *after* good old Mario needed his driver."

"Well, hey, when you didn't call, he got somebody—"

"When I didn't call? Is that what you said . . . when I didn't call? Sal, I punched out that damned number thirty times! *Thirty times, Sal!*"

"You left a message on his answering machine?"

"What answering machine? All I got was *ring-ring-ring.* I tell you, I was so pissed today I could barely talk to my probation officer. I know she thinks I'm on drugs."

"But Mario does have an answering machine! I keep telling him to get a cell phone but he—"

"Sal, listen to me. At the other end of 624-5516 *there is no answering machine.*"

"Whoa, whoa—wait a minute!" He was patting the air with his hands. "That's 624-5510. Zero, not six."

She stared at him for a beat and then fished the index card out of her hip pocket. "See that little stem going up on the left? That's a six!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Naw, Callie, that's a zero. So I'm a little sloppy about the way I close up circles—it still looks a zero to me."

She threw up her arms. "Are you telling me that all that time I was calling a *wrong number*? I actually missed out on a job because of your lousy handwriting? Sal, I am going to kill you."

"Aw, c'mon, it's not that big a deal—it was just a restaurant heist."

"Which I did *not* get a piece of!"

"Hey, it's not the end of the world—there'll be more jobs. C'mon, Callie!"

She let him gradually jolly her into a better mood. He apologized four times. He promised her a better job soon. He wanted to know if they were still friends. Callie reluctantly allowed as how they were. Eventually they shook hands and parted on good terms.

Ass protected.

Hal Stanwyck finally scored, on Friday, spending the night in the woman's apartment. Kevin Craig was convinced that was when the new computer chip exchanged hands. Callie sighed and pointed out that handing over a chip was not exactly an all-night job. Besides, the woman wasn't a pickup; Stanwyck had brought her with him from work to the waterfront. He could have handed over the chip in the car during the drive in from Memotek, if she were his contact. But Kevin wouldn't budge from his conclusion . . . until confronted with personnel records that showed the woman was a new employee and, in fact, hadn't even been living in Port Wolfe at the time the earlier, flawed chip had been smuggled out.

Hal-Baby spent Saturday and Sunday doing chores and playing. Kevin had brought in additional operatives to help with the surveillance, so Callie had to work no more than one eight-hour shift each day. And Monday night she was on Riverview Parkway once again, following Stanwyck toward the waterfront.

But this time was different. For one thing, Stanwyck hadn't left Memotek until nearly seven. For another, he was riding in the backseat of a taxi instead of driving his BMW. Could just be car trouble. Or he could be trying to avoid being followed. If the latter, the guy really was an amateur. It hadn't occurred to him that the sudden appearance of one bright yellow taxicab where no cab had appeared before just might attract a little attention.

The taxi let him out on Front Street; Callie parked under a Deliveries Only sign and took off after him. Stanwyck bought fish and chips from a takeout place and wandered the streets, eating and checking his watch. Then he went into a fried-chicken place for a second bag of sustenance and sat on the front stoop of a featureless building while he ate. And checked his watch. At a quarter to nine, he jumped up and moved off at a fast clip.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Callie wanted to laugh. Stanwyck's idea of how to check for a tail had to come from old Charlie Chan movies. He'd walk along briskly for a while and then whirl to face those behind him, looking for a face he'd seen before. Then he'd pretend to be absorbed in a poster advertising a boxing match that had taken place a year ago, all the while sneaking peeks over his shoulder in what he thought was a casual manner. Once he ventured a block past Third Street into no man's land, turned around, and ventured right back out again.

All this went on for no more than twenty minutes; Stanwyck didn't have the patience to play the game right. He led her to Chung's Palace on Bell Flower Street, a club Callie knew well. She waited five minutes until a couple showed up at the door and fell in behind them, the three of them entering together.

The dinner crowd was thinning out and it was too early for the night revelers, so Chung's was only sparsely occupied at the moment. Stanwyck was seated at a black enameled table in the lounge area that formed a semicircle around the bar, under a papier-mâché dragon suspended from the ceiling. Later in the evening when the place began to fill up, the dragon would belch harmless puffs of orange smoke. *Meet me under Chung's dragon.* Callie had said that herself often enough in the past.

She took a seat at the bar and ordered a Tsingtao beer. The mirror behind the bar gave her an unobstructed view of Hal Stanwyck . . . who was clearly nervous and waiting for someone.

Finally, she arrived. The newcomer was a stunning, small-boned Chinese woman wearing a delicately embroidered turquoise dress. This was no first contact; Stanwyck knew her. He was glad to see her, but still nervous.

Callie couldn't hear what they were saying, but it was clear from watching their reflections that what started as an amicable conversation had quickly turned adversarial. Those two were not in accord at all. Finally the woman slapped her small hand on the table and said something that made Stanwyck's face turn pink.

After a pause, he dipped his right shoulder. Opposite him, the Chinese woman dipped her left shoulder.

He'd passed her something under the table.

Callie's instructions were clear: *Follow the chip.* She paid for her beer and left. Across the street from Chung's Palace was an appliance store, locked up for the night with an iron grille over its glass front. Callie stood with her back against the grille and took her phone out of her backpack.

Kevin Craig would be gone by now, so she'd have to call the night number. Oh, what was his name? The man in charge of night security.

He told her. "Bass Agency, Gene Maxwell speaking."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nice voice. "This is Callie Darrow. I'm on a surveillance job for Kevin Craig and I need to get a message to him. Like right now."

"Please spell your first name, and then tell me the message."

She spelled *Callie* and said, "Tell him the transfer took place and I'm on it."

"Got it. Where are you now, Callie?"

"Outside Chung's Palace, on the waterfront. My subject's going to be coming out any minute."

"Right. Kevin will want you to report in again."

"As soon as I can. And, Gene, tell him not to call me."

"I'm sure Kevin knows not to call while you're on a tail job."

"I'm sure he does too. But tell him anyway."

A soft laugh. "I'll tell him."

Callie broke the connection when she saw the Chinese woman come out of Chung's Palace—alone.

She was more subtle about checking to see if she was being followed than Hal Stanwyck had been, but Callie had one thing going for her: The Chinese woman would be expecting a man. Thank Mr. I-Think-of-Everything Bass for that.

They hadn't gone more than a few blocks past Third Street when Callie realized where they were headed. A few more blocks proved her right: Yep, they were going to China Alley.

China Alley was the widest alley in the waterfront, running from Seneca all the way down to Front Street, lined with warehouse loading docks and service entrances and the backs of soot-blackened buildings with steel doors and boarded-over windows. During the day it was filled with monster trucks disgorging and engorging, men in coveralls straining themselves moving heavy cartons and shipping barrels, other men manipulating loading machines for the really heavy stuff.

But once the commercial working day ended, China Alley changed its nature completely. Out of the surrounding mixture of slums and toney apartments disguised as slums came literally hundreds of vendors to sell their wares. On the loading docks and in the alley itself they set up their booths—some, elaborate folding mini-structures; others, no more than a plank across two crates. Junk jewelry and real jewelry, foods of a dozen different ethnic persuasions, laptop computers of unidentifiable origin, cloth from the Orient that *might* be pure silk, perfumes that *said* Chanel on the labels, porcelain figurines that could be Meissen or K-Mart. None of these people were licensed street vendors, but the police pretty much left them alone so long as they confined their dealing to China Alley.

Nobody remembered or cared what the alley had been called originally. Although members of a dozen nationalities worked at buying and selling in the night market, the alley took its name

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from the preponderance of Orientals there. The booths began at the Seneca Street end of China Alley and ran eastward for about twenty blocks toward the shoreline—and then abruptly stopped, as if some unwritten law dictated that the night market go no farther than Jimson Way, a narrow cross street of no importance. Thus the tourists who never wandered out of sight of the ships in the harbor had no way of knowing of that market flourishing deep inside the zone they'd been warned to stay away from. Casual sightseers were not welcome in China Alley.

The yuppies in Strawberry Hill got a kick out of knowing all they had to do was cross Seneca Street to find themselves in a world that was both exotic and shady. But it was more than that. Underneath the huckstering that was going on openly, there was another level of business being conducted. Wares didn't have to be displayed on a counter to be available. The old Russian selling painted wooden Petroika nesting dolls could get you a tsarist antique, for a fee. The Korean family selling cheap musical instruments was said to have arranged the theft of a Stradivarius from a touring concert violinist. All but the most innocent citizens of Port Wolfe knew that anything they wanted—drugs, weapons, sex—could be found in China Alley.

Callie knew at least two of the vendors here were undercover cops. Unfortunately for the cops, everyone else knew as well. So discretion was the order of the day; there was no open flaunting of illegal goods. The Chinese woman Callie was following headed straight up the alley, glancing neither right nor left, her turquoise dress making her easy to keep in sight. Callie moved from one cluster of people to another, hidden from view both times the other woman checked behind her.

The Chinese woman stopped at a booth selling jade. It was one of the better booths in the alley, with locked glass cases on the counter; Callie caught a glimpse of a credit-card machine on a small table at right angles to one end of the counter. A youngish Chinese man with a small goatee was behind the counter, and he was clearly expecting the woman in the turquoise dress.

Callie stopped at a food stall a little farther along the alley. An elderly Chinese sold her a bowl of noodles, and she sank down on one of the two upended wooden crates the vendor had thoughtfully supplied for his customers. The noodles were good, hot and tangy.

If Callie had blinked, she would have missed it. The Chinese woman passed a small package to the goateed man so swiftly that someone not looking for it would have seen nothing. Both the man and the woman were talking intensely, even looking a bit upset. Not arguing, though.

"Cal, my gal," said a familiar voice. "I heard they couldn't hold you any longer!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Callie looked up at an enormous Oriental beaming down at her, so fat his eyes were mere slits. "Hey, Jimmy!" she replied with fake enthusiasm. "And *I* heard you'd moved to the West Coast."

"Did. Didn't like it. Came back." And that, Callie knew, was all the explanation she'd ever get. He lowered his voice and said, "I've been wondering when you'd be coming to see me."

Jimmy Kwan was a fence, the best Callie had ever known.

"Soon, I hope. I . . . I'm having a little trouble. Readjusting, you know."

He tut-tutted. "Back on the horse, gal."

She nodded. "I know. Sal says he'll have something for me next week."

"Good, good." He patted her paternalistically on the shoulder and moved off down the alley, graceful in spite of his avoirdupois, nodding to the jade sellers as he passed. Now she had Jimmy Kwan to worry about as well as Sal Gagliardo.

The Chinese couple had traded places, the woman now behind the jade counter, minding the store . . . while the man delivered the computer chip? Where?

Callie dropped her plastic noodle bowl and fork into a trash container and strolled along with a trio of men speaking some language she didn't recognize; they looked like middle-Europeans experiencing America for the first time, but they were too shabby to be tourists. Callie had noticed quite a few new immigrants in town since her release from prison. Why Port Wolfe?

Once they were past the jade booth, she hurried ahead of the trio of immigrants, keeping the man with the goatee in sight. He led her all the way down China Alley, past Jimson Way, and into the warren of dark streets that twisted and curved every which way.

Callie liked the area because it was so full of hiding places that she could turn invisible on a second's notice. Several times the goateed man stopped, listening for footsteps. He never heard any.

It was a long walk. The man reached Third Street and kept on going. On Front Street he turned left and covered six more blocks at a steady pace. Then he came to a narrow set of steps leading to the water's edge and started down.

There was little open docking area left in the harbor; most of the frontage was owned by big firms that kept their turf fenced off, locked, and guarded. But the stairway ran down a narrow wedge of land between Global Freight and Sony to a small pier where someone stood waiting.

Callie watched from the top of the steps as the two men climbed into a small motorboat. She started cautiously down the steps as the boat pulled away into the darkness. They seemed to be on a line toward a freighter anchored not too far out in the bay. She pulled the binoculars out of her backpack.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The names painted on the sides of ships had to be kept illuminated and legible at all times, or the harbor master would slap the owners with a stiff fine. The freighter was the *Sofia.* The flag it was flying was also illuminated, but Callie couldn't identify it. She kept the binoculars trained on the ship until she saw the motorboat pull up alongside a ship's ladder draped down the hull. Only one of the men climbed the ladder. She couldn't make out who it was, but it had to be the Chinaman with the goatee. The other man was just the driver.

Callie sank down wearily on the bottom step and took out her phone to report in to Kevin Craig via Gene Maxwell. Her feet were protesting all the walking she'd done; but unless Kevin wanted to call in the Marines for a night attack on the *Sofia,* her work was done for the day.

The hunk behind the reception desk, a.k.a. Julian Woolrich, looked truly sorry to give her the bad news. "Mr. Craig isn't in yet," he said.

Callie felt like pounding her fists on the desk. The break they'd all been waiting for, and that creep Kevin Craig hadn't even shown up yet! He should have been here hours ago, making plans, giving orders, doing *something.* "What about Elinor Sykes?"

"Mrs. Sykes called in sick this morning," Julian said apologetically.

Callie ground her teeth. Damned if she'd call the bigga cheese himself for help. She thought a moment. "Gail, computers—what about her?"

"Gail Forrester? She's in."

"Thanks, Julian." Callie headed off down the hallway. She knew Gail Forrester only to say hello to, as one of the office staff that did mysterious but undoubtedly important things to help keep the Bass Agency the efficient money-making machine it was. Gail's office had more papers, not too neatly stacked, than any other office in the agency. She *lived* surrounded by papers. The only unpapered surface was occupied by a coffee cup and a half-eaten doughnut.

Gail Forrester herself was licking a finger and looked surprised to see Callie standing in the doorway. "Hiya . . . what's up?"

Callie avoided eye contact. "I hate to interrupt your breakfast, Gail, but I need some information."

"That's what I'm here for," the other woman answered cheerfully. "This is for . . . ?"

"Memotek case. Kevin Craig."

"Okay." She made a note in a log book that she was able to pull out of the mountain of papers without even looking for it. "Now, what do you want to find?"

"Can you break into the harbor master's computer?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Whoosh!" Gail laughed. "You want me to do a little illegal hacking?"

"Only slightly illegal. All that information is a matter of public record. But it's current information I want, and that means filling out request forms and going through a lot of red tape. We don't have time for all that." Kevin Craig should have had the info they needed on the *Sofia* ready and waiting by the time she'd come in. "Can you do it?"

"I don't know. I've never tried. Have a seat, Callie. This may take awhile."

Callie sat on the only other chair in the room and watched Gail as she worked. She was an attractive woman in her thirties who was neat and precise in her movements, a trait somewhat at odds with the paper mess around her. She also had a tendency to mutter to herself as she worked. *No sub-menus? Where does that lead? What the . . . ? Oh, very clever!*

At one point she turned quickly in her chair and caught Callie's eye before Callie had a chance to glance away. "Are the harbor master and the harbor patrol under the same jurisdiction?"

Callie shook her head, breaking the eye contact. "The harbor master is God. He's his own jurisdiction."

Gail turned back to her screen. "Well, there's no option for 'God' here . . . let me try this." She went back to typing and muttering.

A strange feeling had been growing in Callie, an unfamiliar feeling that she slowly recognized as envy. Now Gail was humming to herself, leaning forward eagerly in her chair. How fortunate she was, to be doing work she so obviously loved. Gail was not only able to enter a world that was alien to Callie, but she could even make that world behave the way she wanted it to. Callie would have given ten years of her life for that kind of control.

For the first time ever, Callie wondered what it was like to go anywhere in the world through a machine. How long did it take to learn computers? Was she too old to start?

Gail leaned back and smiled. "We're in."

"Hey, nice going." Callie pulled her chair closer. "Look for the records on a freighter named *Sofia.*" A window opened and Gail typed in *Sophia.* "'F,' not 'ph,'" Callie said. Gail made the change and the record they were looking for clicked onto the screen. Callie read through the first few lines. "Registry granted in Togo. Where's Togo?"

"Beats me," Gail replied. "A Pacific island? Let's check the encyclopedia." The *Sofia* record left the screen and after a few seconds a map of Togo appeared: A narrow strip of land in Africa, only the southernmost tip touching on the Gulf of Guinea. A small republic. Adjective form and name of inhabitant: Togolese.

So that was a Togolese flag Callie had seen last night. "Look at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that," she said. "One seaport. One. Is there any way to find out if other ships in the harbor are flying Togolese flags?"

"Ought to be." Back to the harbor master's system. A search turned up five more ships. "Wow," said Gail, "that must be one important seaport."

"I'd be surprised if any of those ships have ever been there," Callie mused. "It used to be that Libya would grant registry to any ship willing to pay the extortionate fee—no questions asked. Then some Central American country started doing the same thing, and now it looks as if other countries are getting in on the act as well."

Gail raised an eyebrow. "Which means . . . ?"

"That the owners don't want their ship looked at too closely."

Up went the other eyebrow. "Smugglers?"

"Maybe. More likely the ship just doesn't meet some international safety standard. Or Togo is included in some excise-free treaty. I don't really know—I'm out of my league here. Could I have a printout of that?"

While the *Sofia* record was printing out, Gail suddenly said, "Tongo. That's the Pacific island I was thinking of. Tongo, not Togo."

"Ah." Callie had never heard of it. She took the pages from the printer. "Thanks, Gail—you've saved me a lot of hassle."

"My pleasure. I may take a look at the harbor patrol's system . . . you know, just to see what's there?"

Callie grinned. "Have fun."

Gail grinned back. "Are you going to be here, around noon? We could 'do' lunch, or even eat it."

Automatically, Callie's defense system clicked into gear. "I'm leaving in about an hour. Maybe next week." Gail Forrester seemed like a nice woman, but she still worked for Sam Bass.

"Okay," Gail said agreeably. When Callie left, Gail was twisting a strand of hair around one finger as she stared at her computer screen, still showing the *Sofia* record.

Callie went into Kevin Craig's office and sat down to read the printout. The *Sofia* was owned by a consortium called Tolbukhin that had a Zürich address. The ship had been built thirty-one years ago in the shipyards at Istanbul. It had sailed from Athens with a cargo of heavy machinery, mostly farming equipment made in Bulgaria.

So. A Swiss-owned Turkish ship sailing from Greece and flying a Togolese flag. And carrying Bulgarian farm machinery.

Bulgarian farm machinery?

Callie shook her head. The whole thing could be perfectly legitimate, with only one member of the crew involved in the lucrative business of smuggling computer chips. Hal Stanwyck stole the chip, the Chinese couple acted as go-betweens, and someone on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

board the *Sofia* would get the chip to the German company that had pirated Memotek's earlier chip.

The *Sofia* had left Athens nearly a month ago, but she'd developed engine trouble and came limping into Port Wolfe harbor almost two weeks late. Her assigned docking slip was now occupied by another vessel, which explained why the *Sofia* was anchored out in the bay. And it meant that that world-famous Bulgarian farm machinery hadn't yet been unloaded. Callie wished Kevin Craig would hurry up and get there.

Finally he did come strutting in, dapper and handsome and pleased with the world. "Ah, Callie," he said, beaming at her as he sat down behind his desk. "That was a nice piece of work last night. Good show."

She mumbled something.

"I'm glad to wrap this one up. Memotek will be pleased to learn who their culprit is."

Will be pleased? "Wait a minute—you haven't told them yet?"

He laughed easily. "It *was* rather late when you reported in. I'm going to call the CEO now."

"You haven't alerted the harbor patrol?"

"To do what? Our job is finished. We were hired to find out who the smuggler at Memotek is, and we've done that. Now, I want you to go write your report—five copies, you know the drill."

She was gaping at him. "I don't believe this! You're just going to let the whole thing drop? That chip's on its way to Germany. If we don't stop it from leaving now, Memotek's lost another bundle!"

"That's up to Memotek," he said sharply. "Don't argue with me, Callie. Go write that report."

She was in a daze as she left. The legal machinery for handling the *Sofia* situation should have been put into operation last night. What the hell was the matter with Kevin?

Then she stopped short. No. The real question was: What was the matter with *her?* What did she care whether the Bass Agency did the job right or not? Why should she worry that Memotek might not get its chip back? How did she get so *involved* in this case? It was nothing to her.

Write the report.

Callie stopped by the employees' kitchen for a cup of coffee that she took with her into the ops' room, a windowless square with a few chairs and tables with typewriters; no computers for the operatives. And one sofa, on which one of the other Memotek ops was snoring away. Callie sat down at one of the typewriters.

A hunt-and-peck typist, she started plugging away. Thirty minutes later she gave the finished report to one of the secretaries and went home to catch up on her sleep.

❖ ❖ ❖

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The ringing phone woke her; her watch said a quarter to two.

It was Kevin Craig. "Get back in here," he ordered. "There's been a development."

"What development?" Callie asked, rubbing sleep from her eyes.

"Hal Stanwyck's been murdered. His body was found floating under a pier this morning."

That shocked her awake. "I'll be right there."

She took a quick shower before grabbing the printout of the *Sofia's* record and driving in to the Atlantic Building, a sense of outrage growing in her all the while. You didn't murder the Hal Stanwycks of the world; you just slapped their wrists. And why would the chip-smugglers kill the goose that laid the golden eggs?

Unless . . . that argument Stanwyck had with the Chinese woman in Chung's Palace. Had Stanwyck demanded too much? Had he threatened to expose her if he was not given a bigger cut? He'd turned over the chip in the end, but the Chinese couple—or whoever gave them their orders, more likely—might have decided that this loose-lipped malcontent was just too big a risk to the operation.

Kevin Craig was waiting in his office, looking like a thunderstorm about to break. "Shut the door."

She shut the door and asked, "How was he killed?"

"Garroted. It must have happened shortly after you reported in for the second time last night. Where was Stanwyck the last time you saw him?"

Under Chung's dragon. "In the club where he handed over the chip. He and the Chinese woman argued—he probably wanted more money. But he was still there when she left."

"So why would he hang around the waterfront after he'd made the transfer?"

Callie shrugged. "Waiting for his payoff? The woman didn't hand him anything."

Kevin bit his bottom lip. "Could be. But that's the police's business, not ours. We have a different problem." He glowered at her. "You should have told me you'd already researched the *Sofia*," he said snappishly.

"But—"

"I had to learn it from Gail Forrester! But never mind that now. Memotek wants to stop that computer chip from leaving Port Wolfe."

"I told you that this morning."

He chose not to hear. "Mr. Bass and the Memotek CEO are conferring right now. They're looking into a search warrant and for legal ways to stop the *Sofia* from sailing—"

"That's not an immediate problem. She's a crippled ship. The *Sofia* won't be going anywhere right away." Callie handed him the printout of the harbor master's record.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He read through it quickly and grunted. "That buys us some time. I never thought that CEO could get so antsy. He wants that chip on his desk right now."

So Kevin had gotten chewed out for not reporting immediately last night. Callie didn't murmur any comforting phrases.

Kevin leaned back in his chair, tapping a forefinger against his chin. "If we play this right, we ought to bring in all of them. Memotek ought to be grateful if we put the smuggling ring out of business. Can you identify the Chinese couple?"

"Sure. They sell jade in China Alley. They're the ones who killed Stanwyck, you know. Or the man did, rather. The woman's kind of small to garrote a good-sized fellow like Stanwyck."

Kevin lifted the corner of his mouth in what came close to being a sneer. "How can you possibly know he killed Stanwyck?"

"Look, this isn't a big gang we're dealing with here," Callie said. "Only four people are involved in the chip smuggling. Hal Stanwyck, the two Chinese, and someone aboard the *Sofia.* The man on the ship would never even have seen Stanwyck—he wouldn't know what he looked like. So he just told the jade seller to take care of it."

"Hmm. Well, we're not being paid to finger a killer. Let the police worry about that." He suddenly leaned forward. "This is what we're going to do. Tonight you and I are going to board the *Sofia* and steal back that computer chip."

Callie gaped. "I've got to get my hearing checked. I would have sworn you said we were going to board the *Sofia."*

"It's the simplest way to wind this thing up. While the CEO and Mr. Bass are fussing with warrants, we just go get the chip. No one will be expecting that."

"Kevin," she said hotly, "that is about the stupidest thing I have ever heard! It's a *freighter,* for crying out loud! You know—a great . . . big . . . ship."

"We don't have to search the entire ship. Just the crew's quarters."

"Uh-huh. And if you had a computer chip potentially worth millions, you'd just leave it in your quarters? You'd carry it with you all the time!"

He didn't like that. "No, I'd conceal it somewhere. In case I was searched."

Callie was exasperated. "Kevin, this is downright lamebrained. I know you're in hot water because you didn't follow up last night, but this is no way to put things right! There's a guy on the *Sofia* who ordered a man's death, in case you've forgotten! Not to mention the fact that sneaking aboard a ship is against the law. And that's another thing—how do you plan to get on board? The *Sofia*'s parked out in the bay."

He showed her his teeth. "That, I'm happy to say, is your job."

"My job!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mr. Bass told us you had connections all over the waterfront. So, use those connections. Get us aboard the *Sofia.*"

Thank you very much, Mr. Large-Mouth Bass. Callie argued with Kevin some more, but he wouldn't budge. He finally got tired of listening to her call him an idiot and pulled rank on her. They were going, and that was that.

"This is suicide," Callie moaned.

"We'll board exactly at midnight," the man in charge said firmly. "That should give us plenty of time to search."

"Oh, good plan. Midnight. Eight bells. Right when they're changing the watch. People coming and going. Midnight it is, Skipper."

He glowered at her. "All right, one o'clock. Meet me in the parking garage here at twelve-thirty. And make sure you have transport to the *Sofia* waiting for us."

"It's going to cost."

"Draw some cash from Accounting. I'll phone."

That was the one bright spot Callie could see. She liked the idea of sticking Sam Bass with the bill for this ill-considered, doomed-to-failure, totally imbecilic outing.

The dive called itself The Crow's Nest, even though it was a cellar bar. Callie walked down the six steps from the sidewalk and pushed open the door. It was only five o'clock, but the place was dark. It was always dark at the Crow's Nest. Callie waited until her eyes adjusted and took a cautious look around. Not a tourist in sight, but quite a few seamen. The Crow's Nest was for serious drinking . . . and for making deals.

It was one place that hadn't changed during Callie's time away. The two street-level windows were still painted black. Still no TV, no jukebox. Solitary drinkers staring into their glasses; huddles of two or three men talking in low voices. Not many women. Two college boys who'd wandered in by accident.

Callie was wrong: One thing was different. New bartender. Young, muscular, stolid-looking; must double as a bouncer.

Over at her usual table in the corner was Bette Wylie, the owner. Bette was a bulletproof old gal whose appearance had never changed in the more than twenty years Callie had known her. Always just a little overweight, but never quite fat. Black hair pulled straight back into a bun—was it dyed now? She was wearing an old lightweight gray sweater that Callie was sure she remembered. Bette ran a lucrative sideline out of her bar, the buying and selling of information; that was one reason Callie had come to see her. The other was that Bette cohabited with a tugboat captain.

Bette was writing checks, paying bills. Callie slid into the chair opposite her and waited. "Heard you were back," Bette said without looking up.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How are you, Bette?"

Bette raised her head and twitched one corner of her mouth, her idea of smiling. "Same as ever. But you look different."

"Yeah, well, being locked up ages you real fast." Callie tipped her head toward the bar. "Who's the new boy?"

Bette looked over at the young man leaning both elbows on the bar, listening to some story a shaky old man was telling. "Calls himself Howard Running-Horse," Bette said. "Light-heavy, training at Max's. The Battling Brave when he can get a bout." Mouth-twitch. "Guy's got maybe one drop of Iroquois blood in his veins."

Callie grinned. "Does he win?"

"Now and then. Good punch, but he's slow-footed."

Enough amenities. "Two things. One big, one little."

"Big first," Bette said.

"Captain Jack's tug," Callie explained. "To take two people out to a freighter moored in the bay without being seen. And back again."

"When?"

"Tonight. One o'clock."

"Price has gone up. Three thousand, half now."

Callie counted out thirty hundred-dollar bills. "Here's the whole thing. And tell Captain Jack to ask the taller of the two he'll be taking aboard for the other thousand that's owed him."

Bette raised an eyebrow.

"Not my money," Callie said. "I'm the go-between."

"I figured that." Bette slid one of the hundreds back to Callie. "What's the ship?"

"The *Sofia*. She's standing off Pier Seventeen."

"Jack will wait twenty minutes, no more. Don't be late. What's the other thing?"

"A name and address. Chinese couple. They sell jade in China Alley. Nice booth, with locked glass cases."

"Window dressing, most likely. Where in China Alley?"

"Between Marquette and Fowler. Across and down a bit from a noodles seller." The China Alley vendors were very proprietary about their space; the jade sellers would be in the same spot. "I think Jimmy Kwan knows them." The fence had nodded to the jade sellers as he passed their booth.

Bette tilted her head. "Why not ask Jimmy yourself?"

Callie smiled. "I need to avoid Jimmy for the next two weeks."

The other woman asked no more questions. And she could be counted on not to reveal who wanted the information. "Check back later tonight."

Callie said she would. She could have found out the Chinese couple's names herself easily enough; but if they were arrested right after she'd been asking about them, there went her cover.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Callie glanced over at the new barman. "This Howard Running-Horse. Does he ever do odd jobs?"

"You need some muscle?"

"Don't know yet. I may."

"Then go over and introduce yourself," Bette said. "He won't work for people he don't know. And Callie," she added, "don't call him Howie. He gets violent when you call him Howie."

Callie nodded her thanks and moved over to the bar. Howard Running-Horse left the shaky old man and came up to her. "Hello, Howard," she said. "My name's Callie."

"Hellooooooo, Callie," he replied, frankly sizing up her bedworthiness. "And what can I do for you?"

"You can memorize my name. I hear you're not averse to picking up a spare buck or two." Since he'd just seen her in hush-hush with Bette Wylie, he'd make the right connection.

"Depends," he said. "What you got in mind?"

"Nothing at the moment. I'd just like to know whether I can call you if I need to."

He leaned forward on the bar. "Honey, you can call me any time you like."

"That's what I wanted to hear," she said cheerfully, and ordered a beer.

But it was all for naught; Kevin Craig wouldn't hear of taking hired protection along on their illicit night excursion. *Some waterfront thug you found? I don't know this guy!* No, this was Kevin's private tea party, and Howard Running-Horse was not invited. It occurred to Callie that she should have just told Howard to show up; Kevin wouldn't have been so inclined to argue with the light-heavyweight looming over him. Well, next time she'd know better.

When they met in the parking garage of the Atlantic Building at 12:30, Callie had collapsed across the hood of Kevin's car in helpless laughter. Kevin was dressed all in black—black watch cap, black turtleneck, black gloves, black trousers, black crepe-soled shoes (which looked new). He'd even painted black smudges under his eyes. In the office, Kevin Craig worked hard at projecting the very image of the dapper, high-tech, new-wave style of detective who wouldn't be caught dead in a trench coat and who openly scorned old-timey melodramatics and physical derring-do. And here all the time he really wanted to be Bruce Willis.

Not too surprisingly, Kevin was a bit testy following her reaction to his ship-boarding outfit and tended to snap as he drove them to the waterfront. "Yes, yes, I've got the thousand for the tugboat captain. I said I'd bring it!"

"His name's Captain Jack," Callie said, "but I'm not going to introduce you. He doesn't want to know your name. He'll deny

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ever having seen you, if someone asks. You're buying silence as well as transportation."

"For four thousand dollars, I should hope so."

"I mean it, Kevin. Don't try to chat with him. Say nothing at all if you can manage it."

"All right, all right, I've got it!"

Captain Jack McNulty was the most taciturn man Callie knew. And he was even better at avoiding eye contact than she was. The man kept to himself, and he never spoke about his night errands. He wouldn't even tell his housemate Bette Wylie that Callie was one of the two he'd picked up this night.

Kevin refused to leave his car on the street, so they had to walk eight blocks from a parking garage to the dock where Captain Jack's tug was moored. On the way they passed two men, both drunk, apparently trying to kill each other. One was wielding an empty bottle as a weapon.

"Watch out for the bottle," Callie said and broke into a trot. The sound of shattering glass reached her ears.

Kevin was right behind her. "God, I hate this place."

They reached the end of the dock; Captain Jack's tug bobbed in the water ten feet below. Kevin started down the ladder.

"Wait," Callie said. "We need permission to board." Kevin stopped on the ladder, halfway down.

Captain Jack stepped out of the pilot house onto the narrow strip of deck. Dark, bearded, nondescript. "Thousand," he said tonelessly.

It took Kevin a beat, but he held onto the ladder with one hand while he fished out an envelope and handed it down to the skipper of the tug. Captain Jack opened the envelope to count the money, grunted, and then went back into the pilot house.

"That's permission to board," Callie said. "Go ahead." The tug started moving the minute her feet touched the deck. Neither by word nor glance had Captain Jack indicated that he'd ever seen Callie before in his life.

Between the two of them, Captain Jack McNulty and Bette Wylie made enough that they could be living in one of the choice riverside homes out toward the western city limits. But they stayed in the waterfront district, both of them wearing clothes that looked as if they came from the Salvation Army. Captain Jack and Bette squeezed the eagle until it screamed.

The one exception to their tight-fistedness was Captain Jack's tug. The *Mary Sue* was not one of the new larger tugs, but she always looked as if she'd come straight from the showroom. A shiny yellow and white craft without a spot of rust on her, she blended in well with the larger ships in the harbor. Kevin was crouched down, holding onto the deck rail with both hands. "I didn't know there'd be so much motion," he complained.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pitiful. Callie said, "Have you figured out yet how we're going to search the crew's quarters while the crew are sleeping in them?" She was counting on Kevin's turning back once he came face-to-face with the enormity of the job he'd planned.

But he just set his jaw. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

Callie sighed. And pointed: "There she is." The *Sofia* lay dead ahead.

Suddenly the *Mary Sue* veered to starboard on a new course that would take them out to sea. "What's happening?" Kevin asked, alarmed. "Where's he taking us?"

"I imagine he's going out to catch the tide. So we can drift in without the engines roaring."

The tug made an easy turn and headed back toward the *Sofia.* When the freighter appeared about the size of a football in the distance, Captain Jack cut the engines and the running lights. They drifted silently through the darkness, their only illumination the glow of the instrument panel inside the pilot house. Then they felt the slightest of jars as the tug's side bumpers touched against the *Sofia*'s hull. Captain Jack knew his stuff.

He went to the foredeck, to what looked like an oversized harpoon gun. It shot out a rope ladder that hooked neatly over the freighter's deck rail. "Three short, one long," said Captain Jack.

"Got it," Callie said.

"What?" Kevin asked.

"Flashlight signal. For him to come back for us."

Ever the gentleman, Kevin allowed Callie to go up the wobbly rope ladder first. When they were both on board, the ladder's hooks snapped out straight and the ladder retracted. Below, Captain Jack pushed off and drifted away.

Callie crouched down low, listening. There'd be a watch fore and aft, but maybe this crew wasn't too conscientious about patrolling the decks amidships.

"Where are the crew quarters?" Kevin hissed in her ear.

"I don't know."

"Damn it, Callie, the night's half gone! Where?"

"Listen carefully, Kevin. I. Don't. Know."

He swore.

Wherever the crew quarters were, they sure as hell weren't up here on deck. The only thing to do was go below and start looking. "Come on," she said.

They went down the first hatchway they came to, into a poorly lighted area that seemed to consist mostly of tunnels of pipes running off in all directions. Callie picked one and they moved forward.

It took them half an hour, but finally they found the crew quarters. The ship seemed dead; only once did they have to duck out of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sight when they heard someone coming. The place certainly wasn't bristling with armed guards, protecting something precious. That convinced Callie that only one man on board was involved in smuggling computer chips to Germany. The *Sofia* herself was concerned only with her cargo of good old Bulgarian farm machinery. They discovered one crewman snoring away, dead to the world, but the rest of the quarters were empty—leading to an inexcusable amount of smirking on Kevin's part. Seamen lived in incredibly cramped quarters, so the searching didn't take long. The snoring crewman didn't wake up even when Kevin dropped his flashlight.

One hatchway led to a little cul-de-sac with two tiny cabins facing each other. The first was the captain's cabin. He had a Middle-European name and he kept his log in a language Callie couldn't even recognize. But no computer chip was to be found. The other cabin belonged to the mate. Kevin searched the arrow locker and the bunk, still thinking a little box holding the chip was lying around somewhere waiting to be found.

Callie looked through what papers she could find. The mate's name was Heinrich Eisler, a German mate on a Swiss-Turkish-Greek-Togolese freighter with cargo from Bulgaria. After a moment she said, "What's the name of the German company that ripped off Memotek's earlier chip?"

"Berendsohn. Why?"

Silently she handed him a sheet of paper. It was a Berendsohn memo to Eisler.

Kevin crowed when he saw the name Berendsohn at the top, but then complained, "I can't read German."

"Neither can I, but what it says isn't important. That's a memo, Kevin . . . not a regular letter. See—no full address or fax number or anything else you find on letterhead stationery. A memo."

He got it. "The mate . . . er, Heinrich Eisler—he's a Berendsohn employee. A plant on this ship?"

"Looks like it. And what do you want to bet Hal Stanwyck wasn't the only string on his banjo? Eisler's the key man. Nail him and the rest of the smuggling ring collapses." She tucked the memo into her backpack. "Time to go, Kevin."

"But we haven't found the—"

"And we're not going to find it. We've looked in all the logical places and it's not there. But we have got evidence linking Eisler to Stanwyck."

He looked dubious. "Illegally-obtained evidence."

"Not evidence for court, but evidence for Memotek. Now that we know who Eisler is, it should be easy to—" She broke off in mid-sentence. "Listen!"

They both heard it: the sound of footsteps on the hatchway steps leading to their cul-de-sac.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kevin looked around the cramped cabin with an air of panic.

"There's no place to hide!"

"Stay here!" Callie hissed, and darted across to the captain's cabin. One of them was going to get caught, but the other would be free to go for help. Who was coming, the mate or the captain?

It was the mate. Callie could hear Eisler's surprised roar when he found the interloper in his cabin. Then there was some shouting in German, and then in English, and then a cry of pain from Kevin. Aw, jeez.

She slipped quietly out of the captain's cabin and was just starting up the hatchway when a Teutonic voice cried out, "Halt!" She turned to see a man standing between the two cabins—big, blond, hard-faced. They locked eyes for a microsecond . . . and then Callie scrambled up to the next deck.

She turned left because most people automatically turn right and ran as fast as her legs would carry her. She could hear Eisler thundering up the hatchway steps and yelling. Worse, she could hear the sound of running feet directly over her head. She took the next hatchway below she came to, jumping down the last five steps.

And almost lost her balance when a woo-woo klaxon went off, scaring her even more; Eisler had sounded the alarm. Callie ran again, listening to the sounds of her pursuers. She was being forced aft, toward the cargo holds. The *Sofia* was a container ship; there'd be no hiding in an open hold here. But it was dark where she was; that would help her. Callie's flashlight showed her an open hatchway. She stepped through . . .

. . . and almost keeled over from the stench. Urine, smoke, garlic, sweat—the place was thick with it. Callie stepped back out again, almost stumbling in her haste. The klaxon suddenly shut off—and Callie heard the sound of voices. She flashed her light around and spotted a footlocker. Inside were two coils of rope; she tossed them behind something that looked like an overgrown water heater and climbed inside the locker. It wasn't quite big enough; the lid wouldn't go all the way shut. But it would have to do.

Callie listened to the mutter of voices coming closer.

Through the slit left open by the lid of the locker, she could see lights bobbing in the darkness. Four men, as well as she could make out, each of them carrying a large lanternlike flashlight. They headed straight for the hatchway that led to the bad smells. Callie concentrated on ignoring the cramp in her left calf and persuading herself she didn't really need to scratch those hundred places on her body that had suddenly started itching. Why were those men taking so long? She wasn't in there, she was out here.

Finally they came back out. They passed the footlocker without a glance and disappeared into the darkness. They weren't search-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing every little nook and cranny? They just wanted to know if she'd found the Place of Disgusting Odors?

Very curious, that was. Callie eased out of the footlocker and spent a minute massaging her calf. Then she went back to the open hatchway and took a deep breath.

Inside, what her flashlight showed her were bunk beds. Row after row of them, stacked eight high, going as far back as she could see. Callie covered her mouth and nose with her hand and stepped cautiously between two rows of the bunks; they were placed so close together that someone with wide shoulders would have to move sideways. There was other evidence of recent human habitation, aside from the terrible reek. A torn shirt left on one of the bunks, a forgotten book, a few empty food cans.

People. The ship's real cargo was people. The *Sofia* was smuggling illegal aliens into Port Wolfe.

So that's why she and Kevin had run into no armed guards above; the crew had already unloaded their cargo. In longboats, in the dead of night? The beam of her flashlight caught a thick, upright steel post. Ah, that's what they'd done. They'd knocked out the bulkheads between container sections and substituted steel supports, turning the whole area into one cavernous dormitory. How many other mobs of displaced people had the *Sofia* turned loose in Port Wolfe? And how desperate those people must be to go through this to get here.

She'd seen enough . . . and smelled enough. She left the human-cargo area and made her way forward, pausing to listen every few minutes. No portholes this far belowdecks, and most portholes were too small to climb through anyway. She was going to have to go back up.

It took her a nerve-wracking thirty minutes to reach the main deck. She stopped to listen every few seconds, hesitating to advance when no ready place of concealment presented itself. But eventually she worked her way to the spot on deck where they'd climbed Captain Jack's ladder. Her hands were shaking so much she almost dropped the flashlight. Three short, one long. What if Captain Jack had been scared off by the klaxon?

No! There it was, an answering flash of light. He was on his way.

Then all the *Sofia*'s deck lights came on.

Callie immediately crouched down, her heart pounding and her back pushed hard against one of the davits supporting a lifeboat. Voices came from the foredeck. Staying low, she risked a look. Two men were unfastening the covers over the lifeboats to see if she was hiding inside one.

Hurry, Captain Jack!

The *Mary Sue* throttled down as she bumped the freighter's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hull. No silent drifting in this time. Captain Jack knew something was up; he had to have heard the klaxon. And no time for the ladder. But if she dropped that far down to the deck of the tug, she'd break every bone in her body.

Captain Jack came out of the pilot house. Callie tossed him her backpack with its nonwaterproof contents, held her nose, and jumped.

The slap of the water shocked her into momentary paralysis, but then she was fighting her way back upward. She could make out the white bottom of the *Mary Sue* and headed toward that. The second she broke the surface, Captain Jack's big hand grabbed her arm and hauled her roughly aboard. He left her panting on the foredeck as he stepped back into the pilot house and opened the throttle. There was shouting from the *Sofia,* followed by the crack of two rifle shots. Terrified, Callie hugged the deck as the *Mary Sue* slipped away into the darkness.

Kevin Craig. They won't kill him. They'll keep him alive to find out about me.

Callie dragged herself to the pilot house. The *Mary Sue* was running without lights, Captain Jack squinting into the darkness ahead. If he wondered about Kevin, he gave no sign. Without moving his head, he pointed to a locker in the corner. Callie took out a blanket and wrapped herself up, shivering more from fear than from wet and cold.

Think. Help for Kevin first. That nincompoop. She ought to call the agency's night man, Gene something, Gene Maxwell. The agency would know how to keep Kevin from looking an utter fool in tonight's muck-up.

That decided her. She'd call the agency last.

Which meant the police, for whom Callie had no great love. And did the Immigration and Naturalization Service know this wholesale people-smuggling was going on? Personally, she didn't give a hoot how many illegals were in Port Wolfe; but if she could hand the INS a prize like the *Sofia,* they might put in a good word for her with the police. She'd broken a law or two herself this night.

"Captain Jack," she said, "take me to the harbor patrol station."

"No." Nothing else, just *no.*

"Then put me ashore within walking distance."

The boat veered a little as he changed course. Soon they were in the heavily trafficked area of the harbor, and Captain Jack turned on the running lights. He let her off at a repair dock south of the harbor patrol. And before she could say a word, the *Mary Sue* was gone.

Callie ran all the way to the station, her wet sneakers squishing uncomfortably. There was more than a little turmoil inside her; for the first time in her life, she was going to the police for help.

The harbor patrol didn't believe her at first; she'd expected that.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Only when the officer in charge called Gene Maxwell and confirmed that Callie did indeed work for the Bass Agency, did they move into action. Callie had told them that a Bass detective was being held aboard the *Sofia* and his life was in danger, that the *Sofia* was being used to smuggle in illegal immigrants, and that the ship's mate had in his possession a new computer-chip prototype stolen from Memotek. Details later.

The officer had notified INS immediately, and then the station had emptied of all but two people—one to handle the phone and radio, the other to "make sure the lady doesn't leave."

The station had a glass front, and outside a narrow deck ran around three sides of the structure. Callie went out and leaned on the deck rail, her guard following discreetly. She took the phone out of her backpack and punched in Bette Wylie's number.

Bette was furious at being awakened at four in the morning; Captain Jack wasn't home yet, then. Callie cut through the complaints with an urgency that Bette reluctantly responded to. The Chinese couple were named John and Nancy Ling, and they lived at 1042 Jumonville Street, apartment 404.

Callie broke the connection and called police headquarters. This time she said that a jade-seller named John Ling of such-and-such an address had killed Hal Stanwyck, that he did so on the orders of a man named Heinrich Eisler, who was even now being arrested by the harbor patrol aboard the *Sofia,* and that they'd better shake a leg if they wanted to get in on the bust. When she said she was with the Bass Agency and was calling from the harbor patrol station, they listened.

Callie stood for a moment holding the phone. Harbor patrol, the Immigration people, regular city police—was that enough witnesses to Kevin Craig's foolishness? The big brave private detective who needed the resources of three law-enforcement agencies to rescue him? Would that embarrass Mr. I-Am-God Bass enough?

Nah. Callie called Information and got the numbers of Port Wolfe's two big daily newspapers and three of its television stations. Only when those calls were done did she make the call she should have made first.

"Bass Agency, Gene Maxwell speaking."

"Gene, this is Callie. I—"

"Callie! The harbor patrol just called about you."

"I know, I know. Listen, grab a pencil. I have got a lot to tell you."

"Mr. Bass tells me I'm to give you a raise," said Elinor Sykes.

Callie wasn't expecting that. "No shit!"

The other woman's face was blank. "No shit," she replied drily. "He says the kind of publicity you got the agency last night couldn't be bought with love nor money."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He's not pissed off?"

"On the contrary, he's well pleased." She looked at Callie curiously. "Did you really jump off that freighter into the bay?"

"Yeah, well, it beat the alternative."

Elinor shook her head in amazement. "Mr. Bass also told me to say that was a smart move . . . going after his weakest link."

Callie grinned. "How's Kevin doing?"

"He'll recover. Those thugs on the *Sofia* gave him a pretty rough going-over, but nothing was hurt that won't heal. In time."

"No more than he deserves," Callie said cheerfully.

Elinor frowned. "Are you really that callous?" She took a deep breath. "Mr. Bass further instructed me to say that even though it was a smart move on your part, it didn't work. Kevin is going to come out of this a hero. He's going to be a media darling. The noon news has already done one awestruck piece about him. One man by himself, taking on the baddies all alone—"

"He wasn't alone!"

A sigh. "I'm to say two words to you. I don't know what they mean. Mail clerk."

Callie sucked in her breath; she knew what they meant, all right. If her name was plastered all over the papers, her parole officer would want to know what a mail clerk was doing boarding freighters in the middle of the night. "Damn!" After all she went through last night, that bitty-brain Kevin was going to get the credit? She stood up angrily. "Dammit to hell!"

"Please don't shout. He said you'd take it badly."

Damn, damn, damn! Callie walked aimlessly in a circle, flapping her arms. She had never felt more frustrated.

"But Mr. Bass understands what you did," Elinor Sykes went on, "and you won't find him ungrateful. He's already squared things with the harbor patrol, and he suggests you take some time off. With pay, of course."

"Afraid I'll talk?" Callie snapped.

"He's just trying to make it up to you."

Like hell he was, Mr. Goddam-Paternalistic Bass. He was rubbing her nose in it. She grabbed her backpack off the floor and headed for the door.

"Callie, a word of advice," Elinor Sykes said kindly. "Don't lock horns with Mr. Bass. He always wins. Always."

"Nobody *always* wins."

"Mr. Bass does. He won this time, didn't he?"

"Yes," Callie admitted, opening the office door. "This time."

She slammed the door behind her. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT ISSUE...

Makeover
BY BARBARA CALLAHAN

For Services Rendered
BY JEFFERY DEAVER

Miracles Happen
BY DOUG ALLYN

Police Business
BY MICHAEL GILBERT

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. Vol. 114, Nos. 3&4. Whole Nos. 697 &698, September/October 1999. Published monthly except for a combined September/October double issue by Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications. 1 year subscription $33.97 in U.S.A. and possessions, $41.97 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds (GST included in Canada). Call 800-333-3053 with questions about your subscription. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 54625, Boulder, CO 80322-4625. Editorial Offices, 475 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016. Executive Offices 6 Prowitt St., Norwalk, CT 06855-1220. Periodical postage paid at Norwalk, CT and at additional mailing offices. Canadian postage paid at Montreal, Quebec. Canada Post International Publications Mail, Product Sales Agreement No. 260649. © 1999 Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications, all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Submissions must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 54625, Boulder, CO 80328-4625. In Canada return to Transcontinental Sub Dept., 525 Louis Pasteur, Boucherville, Quebec, J4B 8E7. USPS 523-610, ISSN 1054-8122. Dell GST: R123054108. For back issues, send your check for $5.00 (U.S. funds) to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Suite SM-100, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855-1220. Please specify the issue you are ordering. Add $2 per copy for delivery outside the U.S.

PRINTED IN CANADA

PRINTED WITH SOY INK

JANET HUTCHINGS
Editor

RACHEL FUNARI
Editorial Assistant

SUSAN KENDRIOSKI
Executive Director,
Art & Production

VICTORIA GREEN
Senior Art Director

SHIRLEY CHAN LEVI
Assistant Art Director

CAROLE DIXON
Production Manager

ABIGAIL BROWNING
Manager, Subsidiary Rights
& Marketing

BRUCE W. SHERBOW
Director of Newsstand Sales

SANDY MARLOWE
Circulation Services

JULIA McEVOY
Manager, Advertising Sales

PETER KANTER
Publisher

WARREN RIVERS
Editorial Director

ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief 1941-1982

ELEANOR SULLIVAN
Editor-in-Chief 1982-1991

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE
DAVID GELLER PUBLISHER'S REP
(212) 682-1540 (Display Advertising)

RUSSELL JOHNS ASSOCIATES
(800) 237-9851 (Classified Advertising)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

Advertise to the World's largest mystery magazine audience with our Ellery Queen/Alfred Hitchcock combined classified section. Ad Rates per issue: $4.95 per word (10 word minimum), $350 per column inch (2.25 inch maximum). SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER: Buy two issues and receive a third issue FREE. Send orders to: Dell Magazines, Classified Department, P.O. Box 1510, Clearwater, FL 33757-1510. Direct inquires to: (800) 237-9851; Fax (727) 445-9380.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS! Up to $100 each. Send name, address: Calco Publishing (C-299), 26 Barnes North, Wallingford, CT 06492.

DOUBLE YOUR MONEY IN DAYS with amazing Penny Stocks. It's easy. Free report. Kirk, P.O. Box 272, Manhattan, KS 66505-0272.

AUTHORS

AGENT SEEKING AUTHORS. SASE: Deb GEM, 4717 Poe Road, Medina, OH 44256. www.gembooks.com

ATTENTION AUTHORS. Established publisher with international offices can arrange the editing, publication, promotion, warehousing, and distribution of your book. Pentland Press, Dept. EQ, (800) 948-2786.

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

FREE CATALOG Collectible and used mystery books. Dunn and Powell Books, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, ME 04609-1714, dpbooks@acadia.net/www.dpbooks.com

FREE LISTS. Quality used mystery paperbacks. Steve Lewis, 62 Chestnut, Newington, CT 06111.

FREE CATALOGS Collectible/used mysteries. Murder is Served, 5273 Bittersweet Drive, Dayton, OH 45429. (937) 438-0211.

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

THREE FULL-LENGTH Calamity Jane Mysteries in one volume. "Clues Out Of The Past", "The Right Job For Ol' Calam", and "Death At A Gallop", by Catherine Weber. www.buybooksontheweb.com

BACK ISSUES: EQMM (1941-), AHMM, MSMM, Saint, other digests. (707) 963-0201.

SEND FOR FREE catalog of mystery and detective fiction. Canford Books, Drawer 216E, Freeville, NY 13068.

MYSTERY ADDICTS! Free Catalog! New and recycled detective fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-C, Cincinnati, OH 45232, www.gravematters.com

CATALOGS

FREE CATALOG – New/used mysteries. Great selection, bargain prices! Murder Most Foul, Suite 896E, Candor, NY 13743. www.murdermostfoul.com

INTERNET

CLASSIFIED ADS under this heading or any of the other 20 subject areas we offer can be very rewarding.

TRAVEL/TOURS

MURDER MYSTERY CRUISE. 12th annual Murder Mystery Cruise, May 21, 2000. Seven-day Alaska cruise aboard Holland America Line's beautiful ms Statendam. Guest writer, Nancy Pickard. Call CruiseWorks: (800) 876-6664.

FREE AD OFFER IN OUR MYSTERY COMBO

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PLACING A CLASSIFIED AD IN OUR NEXT TWO ISSUES AND RECEIVE A THIRD AD FREE!

Your ad will reach a combined audience of 300,000 readers in our outstanding publications – **ELLERY QUEEN** and **ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S** Mystery Magazines.

DELL MAGAZINES

Call (800) 237-9851 • FAX (727) 445-9380

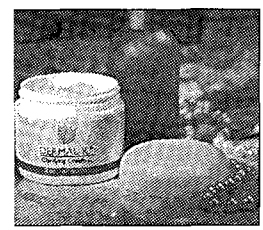
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KIN CARE UPDATE

he "hidden" problem that forces illions of women to wear pants... nd the natural solution!

rmerly available only through dermatologists, this azing cream eliminates ugly spider veins in just weeks.

Melinda Walthington

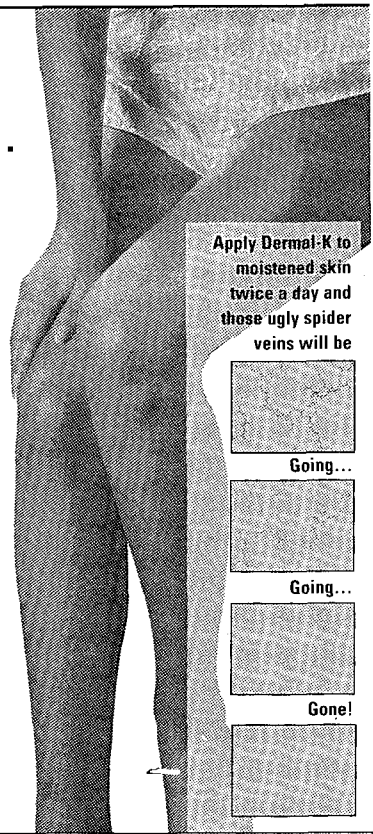


It's estimated that half of the adult female population is plagued by spider veins! Small, thin veins lying close to the skin's surface, spider veins are red or blue in color. They may appear in true "spider" fashion, with web-like oups of veins radiating out from a central area, they can ok like fine lines or appear in "starburst" clusters. though men are not immune to spider veins, they are erwhelmingly a female problem. Unlike large, bulging ricose veins that can cause pain and even lead to serious alth problems, spider veins are primarily a cosmetic oblem.

Not even proper diet and exercise are guaranteed to prent unsightly spider veins. They tend to be hereditary, and orsen as we age. Aside from changing the way u dress, using concealing makeup or resorting expensive treatments, there has been little you uld do to get rid of spider veins—until now!

ecret weapon. Formerly available only rough plastic surgeons and dermatologists, ofessional-strength Dermal-K eliminates spider ins—without painful shots or expensive treatents! This unique cream can make embarrassing ins disappear in just weeks, painlessly, easily d inexpensively.

ientific solution. Vitamin K is essential to the er for the formulation of substances that prote blood clotting. A blend of Vitamin K and ner healing compounds, Dermal-K strengthens pillaries, enhances coagulation and heals weaked tissues. Plastic surgeons have long used this am to minimize post-operative bruising and rring. Apply Dermal-K twice a day and watch der veins fade...and finally disappear!



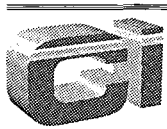
Risk-free. Dermal-K is backed by a 30-day manufacturer's limited warranty as well as Comtrad's risk-free home trial. Try it, and if you are not absolutely satisfied, return the unused portion within 30 days for a full refund, "No Questions Asked."

Dermal-K . . . . . **$29.95** $5 S&H
Buy two or more jars . . . . . **$24.95** each
Please mention promotional code 2967-16225

For fastest service, call toll-free 24 hours a day

800-992-2966

DISCOVER NOVUS VISA MasterCard American Express Cards

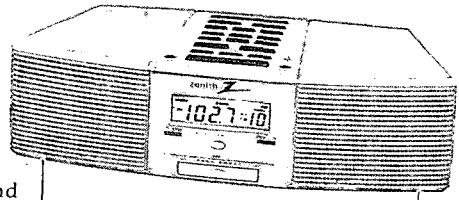


comtrad industries
2820 Waterford Lake Dr., Suite 102
Midlothian, Virginia 23113

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Big sound from a stereo radio—without the big price!

Zenith Audio, a leading electronics manufacturer designs a "Small Footprint," "Big Sound" stereo system and drives the price below $100.



Micro-Electronic Sound Breakthrough

State of the art stereo sound quality in a stylish cabinet

- AM/FM/TV Bands
- Stereo Speakers with Crystal Sound System
- Digital Weather Band
- 37 Preset Station Memories
- Ascending Tone Alarm
- Wake/Sleep to Radio, Weather or TV Band
- "Fail-safe" Alarm System

Zenith Audio has developed a Digital Stereo Clock Radio that boasts the acoustic quality and practical features of stereo radios four times as expensive. You'll be amazed at the sound quality and powerful bass you get from a radio this small and this affordable. This stereo radio features an 11-key handheld remote control and an input jack for CD players or other audio sources.

Loaded with features. The AM/FM radio features digital tuning for pinpoint reception and crystal-clear sound. The STEREO indicator allows you to tune in to the stereo signal. It also picks up TV and WEATHER signals with 13 TV channels and 7 Weather channels, so your Zenith Audio Clock Radio is a great source of news, entertainment and information. You can program the unit's memory for 37 preset stations, and the tuning buttons can operate either manually or in a automatic search mode.

Practical functions. The backlit clock has several alarm functions, so you can wake to either radio, TV, weather or a buzzer. The sleep timer allows you to fall asleep to up to 90 minutes of music, TV or weather and then shuts off automatically. In the morning, if you need a few extra minutes of sleep, press the SNOOZE bar on the control panel or on the remote. The radio or alarm tone stops for 10 minutes and then sounds again. The unit's battery backup system will maintain the time, alarm and preset station memories in the event of a temporary power interruption.

Factory direct risk-free offer. You can spend hundreds of dollars more on a stereo radio, but why do it? We get the Stereo Clock Radio direct from Zenith and pass the savings on to you. This product comes with a one-year manufacturer's limited warranty and Comtrad's exclusive risk-free home trial. If you are not satisfied for any reason, simply return it within 90 days for a full "No Questions Asked" refund.

Zenith Crystal Clear Stereo. .$99.95 $12 S&H

Please specify white or black.

Please mention promotional code 4242-16226

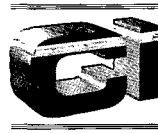
For fastest service, call toll-free 24 hours a day

800-992-2966

DISCOVER NOVUS VISA MasterCard American Express Cards

To order by mail, send check or money order for the total amount including S&H. To charge it to your credit card, enclose your account number and expiration date.

Virginia residents only—please include 4.5% sales tax.



comtrad industries

2820 Waterford Lake Dr., Suite 102
Midlothian, Virginia 23112

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED